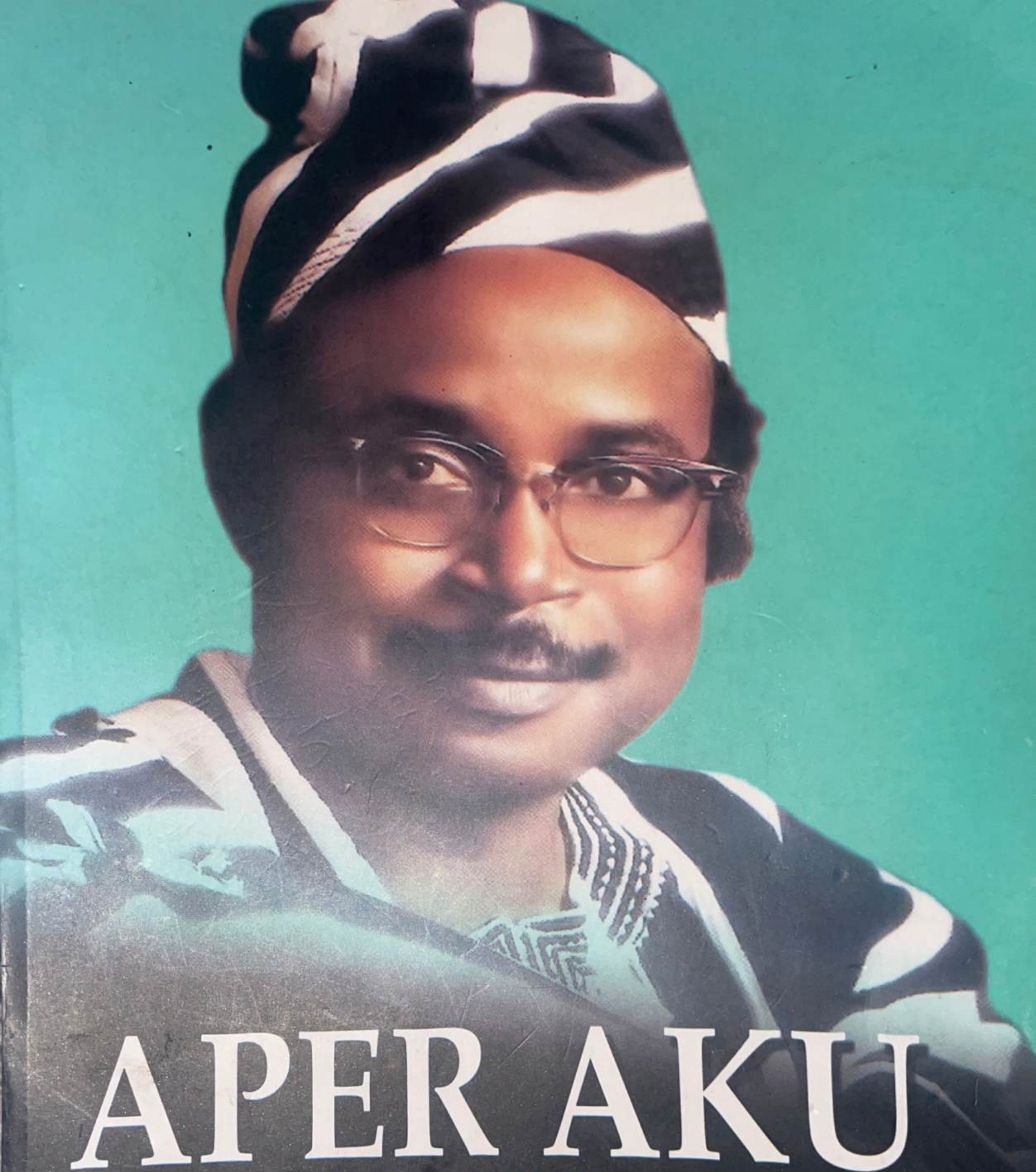

APER AKU

The Rise of Minority Politics in Nigeria

Nathaniel Ikyur

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With Compliments of the Author to
Chief Akua Aku,
'Akinde u Tiv'

14/11/2014

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Nathaniel Ikyur

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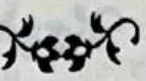

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Rt. Hon Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, CFR, Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives of Nigeria in the 7th Assembly. He has proven to be an uncommon leader of our time, a champion for good governance, probity, fairness and equity and has continually committed himself to serving the nation.

Acknowledgements

Sometime in 2008, I ran into the late governor of old Kano State, Alhaji Muhammad Abubakar Rimi at the foyer of the National Assembly, Abuja. He had come to meet with one of the legislators, Rep. Farouk Lawan whom I worked with as his Senior Legislative Aide. While I walked with him to our office, I reminded him of our earlier relationship while I served in Kano as the State Correspondent of *Vanguard* Newspapers. Our discussions veered into the travails of former political leaders in the Second Republic in the hands of the military.

The details of the interactions Rimi said he had with late Aper Aku while they shared a space in Kaduna prisons after the military coup in 1983 propelled me to seek to document on the struggle and politics of Aku with particular reference to minorities. I therefore pay glowing tributes to Rimi for providing me with the initial tonic that energized me into writing this posthumous biography.

I am grateful to the Almighty God for His grace and continuous wisdom.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar, *Turakin Adamawa* and *Zege-Muie-U-Tiv*; President of the Senate in the Second Republic, Dr. Joseph Wayas for sparing time to write the Foreword to this book. I am full of thanks to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Aminu Waziri Tambuwal CFR, for his support. Special thanks to the Benue State Governor, Rt. Hon. Gabriel Torwua Suswam for not only challenging Tiv writers to explore more possibilities in putting our history into perspective but also being personally committed to the realization of this project. Suswam also wrote the Preface. His predecessor, Senator George Akume, I also thank for his numerous contributions to this project. I am full of appreciation to Senator Barnabas Gemade.

I am grateful to John Odah, former General Secretary of the Nigeria Labour Congress, NLC for his selfless contributions. Dr. Samuel Ortom, Minister of State for Trade and Investment, Hon.

Tivlumun Nyitse, Permanent Secretary Government House Makurdi, Prof. Saint Gbilekaa; Chief of Staff to Governor Gabriel Suswam; D.T Adem, Director of Legal Services at the National Assembly; Hon. Emmanuel Jime, Hon. Chile Igbawua, Deputy Chief of Staff to the Speaker House of Representatives.

I am indebted to Dan Okereke, Executive Director, (Communications), American University, Yola for providing some insightful details on how this book will be appreciated in the public domain. I am also grateful to Onah Iduh, Esther Ayede and Lynda Adzuanaga, aka *Ikpanyar I Kwande* who read through the first manuscripts. I thank Patricia Adezungwen Anchi, my friend who has remained a valuable asset in the course of this book project.

I deeply appreciate Mr. Asor Shinyi, a former Director of the Benue State Library Board and his entire staff for their concern while I researched on the book. Shinyi went the extra mile to get Aku's inaugural speech of October 1, 1979 to make this book a near complete volume when I had almost lost hope. I also thank the staff at National Library of Nigeria, Abuja and Kaduna. They gave me access to valuable materials under very difficult situations. I am also grateful to the Head Librarian of the Benue State House of Assembly for some other materials I got for the book.

Many thanks to late Isaac Aku and his son, late Akor for the interviews and for providing me with some documents as well as the letters the former governor wrote from prison. Words will fail to express appreciation to Mrs. Fidelia Mbateren Aku. She was there from the beginning when Aper was detained over the allegations against Gomwalk. To Mrs. Victoria Aku, the former First Lady, I remain greatly indebted for being an asset. Some of the somewhat secret correspondences between Aku, the party hierarchy and some individuals were supplied by this woman who stayed on with her husband to the very end. Interviews conducted with Victoria were so emotional. It underscores her relationship with her late husband. It was also very instructive in understanding the relationship they both shared with each other. Akua Aku, the first son of the former governor stood by me throughout the research period and the writing of this book. He also gave me some insights on how best the work could be accomplished.

I must not forget some of the cabinet members in Aku's government who volunteered interviews and information. These include Alhaji Sule Iyaji who rose from being a commissioner to deputy governor when Aku was re-elected between October and December 1983. I also extend this appreciation to Audu Ogbeh, former deputy speaker and later Minister of Communications, Vincent Uji, Kpamor JT Orkar and Toryima Orga. They took me into some of the deeper thoughts of this emancipator and foremost anti-corruption crusader. I must not fail to mention also Chief Godwin Okpeh and Chief Obande Obeya for their useful contributions into the workings of Aku's political artistry. Some other aides to the former governor who helped in this project include V.T. Azer, former Principal Private Secretary to Aku, John Mbapuun, his former Press Secretary. They all gave me valuable information.

There are two intellectuals that deserve more than a passing mention. Dr. Terhemba Shija, journalist, politician and an accomplished academic also made the success of this book a reality. Apart from providing intellectual input, Shija ensured the book came out within a specific timeline. I say thank you. And to my brother and friend, Adagbo Onoja, I say a big thank you. He did not only encourage me from the onset but also read through the manuscript, re-structured some certain aspects in the book and re-directed the narrative flow of the work. I must not forget to acknowledge Elvis Attah and Elijah Sase; Director-General and Marketing Director of Radio Benue for their complementary roles in this project. I must not forget Alhaji Aminu Mudi, Assistant Director News as well as Priscilla Shanna all of Nigerian Television Authority, Makurdi Network Centre for their efforts at getting some old materials on Aku for me. I must not forget to acknowledge Clive Asugh Aganyi and Bem Vangeryina as well as JJ Professionals and Steve Aondongu for typing some portions of the book. Celestine Onah designed the cover.

I also want to express appreciation to my family, particularly my wife, Regina and my three children, Othniel Tersur, Nora Nguavese and Jesse Sedondo. I love you all.

Preface

Late Aper Aku's stint as Governor of Benue State from 1979-1983 has been rightly perceived by many discerning observers and political commentators as inaugurating Benue's development. Hence Aku more than any of Benue's past governor laid the foundation for her socio-economic development which all successive administrations have claimed affinity with.

The book, *Aper Aku: The Rise of Minority Politics in Nigeria* by Nathaniel Ikyur is a worthy attempt at nationalizing the tenure of Aku's political engagement and revalidating his place in Nigerian history. Aper Aku is germane to any debate about minority right struggles, social justice and corruption in Nigeria. The sustained brilliance and courage with which he navigated the conflicting political and social currents of his day is well captured in this book. The author's succinct portrayal of Aku's political travails, his intellectual, moral and visionary leadership of Benue State which was a fallout from his anti-corruption struggles with the Gomwalk government is rendered in a lucid and coherent manner. In spite of Aku's successes however, he was rabidly fought because he refused to kowtow to elite perfidy and patronage. This is an instructive lesson for Nigeria's contemporary leaders for Aku was indeed a personification of the leader as servant.

Aku's government was predicated on an open door policy since he was open and receptive to new ideas and innovations. He was thus able to establish a political legacy that is worthy of celebration as aptly documented for posterity in this book.

Aku's greatest and perhaps most understated political achievement was his role in the minority struggle for political relevance. Perhaps due to the larger than life personality and the pivotal role played by his more illustrious mentor J.S. Tarka in the emancipation of minority groups in Nigeria from political marginalization and discrimination, there is a tendency to hang Aku's claim to national prominence and significance as an anti-

corruption crusader on the strength of the petition he filed against the J.D. Gomwalk government of Benue-Plateau State in 1974. That reading of the barometer of Aku's political success is simplistic.

The seminal insight which Aku shed on the future of Nigeria's political stability is an area where the Benue State government and especially the federal government headed by a president from the minority would do well to reengage and this book is a timely reminder of the need to begin that re-engagement.

Rt. Hon. Gabriel Torwua Suswam, PhD
Governor, Benue State.

Foreword

I am not sure if Nathaniel Ikyur was anything close to understanding how politics in the Second Republic was played. But I am thrilled by his depth of recounting history. That was when Aper Aku and some of us played key roles in the democratic evolution in Nigeria. While Aku was the governor of Benue State, I was the President of the Senate. All the same, we worked very closely, particularly because we were all members of the ruling party at the time, the National Party of Nigeria, NPN.

Looking back now from the lenses of Nathaniel's narrative on the life and politics of the man Aku, it is interesting to see how things were, how they are now and where we are heading as a nation. Aku was undoubtedly one of the most humble politicians with an uncommon persona that I had ever come across. He was a man of very little pretensions and straight forward. Aku did not see politics as an avenue to enrich himself but more as a vehicle to lift up the standard of living of his people.

Aku had a very broad view of Nigerian politics at the time and the future. And he demonstrated this much when he alongside other patriots across other minority groupings saw the danger of the minorities falling out of place in the scheme of things in the country if certain parameters of political equation were not properly put in place. The re-invention of the minority caucus in the NPN which he led successfully in the end scared the other majority groups.

Today in history, first of all in Benue, and indeed Nigeria, he will never be forgotten. The bridges of brotherhood that he built across the country for the overall interest of the nation are yielding results. It has strengthened our faith as a people to seek for a just and equitable future for a united Nigeria where all tribes will aspire for

any position. I therefore prescribe this book to all lovers of Nigeria to read and pass on to the next generation.

Rt. Hon. Dr. Joseph Wayas, GCON
Former President of the Senate
(1979-1983)
Abuja.

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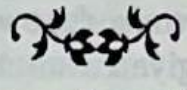


Introduction

I was in my second year in the secondary school when Aper Aku took oath of office as the first democratically elected governor of Benue State on October 1, 1979. Although my late father belonged to the opposition party, the Nigeria People's Party, NPP, he often times during discussions at relaxed moods, spoke well of the strides of Aku's government. I grew up to become conversant with the phrase that "Aku laid the foundation of a new Benue." Indeed, the foundation he laid dots the length and breadth of the state. This includes some parts of present day Kogi State. Unfortunately, there is no known vocabularly on Aku's life as a political leader or with his strides.

It is in the light of this that I devoted time to explore and put into a book, the story of the politics of Apollos Aper Aku, Second Republic civilian governor of Benue State. He was at various times the object of controversy among both friends and foes. The study of the politics of this man could, therefore be situated within the context of former Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat's description of leadership. Sadat once said that "the reputation of some leaders grow after they leave office. But others shrink." Yet still, Sadat noted "the judgment of history sometimes turns giants into pygmies. And sometimes the men earlier dismissed as pygmies are turned into giants." Great leaders he said, "excite great controversies. They acquire strong friends and bitter enemies." All of these typify the personality of the father of today's modern Benue and symbol for the minority struggle in Nigeria.

As from 1969, the Benue province then under Benue-Plateau State when it was created was completely neglected. The people were worried. It was somewhere around this time that agitations began to build up among the politically enlightened individuals from the area that constituted Benue province.

Aku, like many of his compatriots was not impressed with the way things had turned up against the Benue province and

particularly Tivland. The lopsided manner Police Commisioner Joseph Gomwalk, then Military Governor of the old Benue-Plateau State awarded contracts was worrisome. Aku was particularly worried that Tivland was backward. He felt that the area he came from was neglected. And that the siting of the state capital in Jos had affected the Benue province that was larger. His worries also stemmed from the fact that given a sound policy strategy, economic activities within this area will spring up that could generate development. In this, he also saw among the Tiv people, a virile and hardworking youth that were wasting away.

Agitations against Gomwalk's leadership in the state began to swell up even as the government, backed by the federal might, would not budge or retrace its steps. This was how Aper Aku, an educationist who was then operating a small business in Gboko, took up the gauntlet and signed up to challenge Gomwalk.

Aku's affidavit against Gomwalk was seen more as fallout from the way Joseph Tarka, Aku's benefactor was hounded out of office as a minister in Gen. Yakubu Gowon's government under very suspicious circumstances. It took a year for the affidavit to take the desired effect but it did make a hero out of Aku. This singular act propelled Aku into Tiv and national political consciousness. It didn't come as easy though. There was a price to be paid, as he was thrown into detention by the military authorities for daring to stand up against the system. But of course, this paved the way for him when he sought for the governorship of Benue State when party politics returned in 1979. Against all odds, he rode on the wings of his anti-corruption credentials to become the first executive governor of Benue State in the Second Republic.

Aku's worries became more real when he took over as governor in 1979. From what he met on ground, Benue State from its creation in 1976, remained among the very few states that were to build up its infrastructures from scratch. This was despite the vast agricultural potentials which formed the basis for agro-based industries. The state remained, as it were, land-locked, underdeveloped and inexplicably pitiable. Aku changed that all in a very short spell in office with a determined vision.

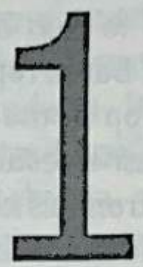
Beyond the passion to develop Benue, Aku epitomized the struggle for the political rights of the minority in Nigeria after the death of

his benefactor, J.S. Tarka. He envisioned that Nigeria's political composition is incomplete without the minorities in the equation. Never again should Nigeria be considered as standing on the tripod of Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani. He saw the population of the minority groupings in Nigeria as the fourth force that cannot be wished away. In 1982, Aku was the first political figure in the country to advocate a six-regional political power sharing arrangement which Gen. Sani Abacha adopted through the 1994/95 Constitutional Conference.

It was Aku's reasoning that the instability of Nigeria is partly caused by the uncertainty in the minds of its constituent ethnic groups as to whether they can ever become elected president of this country. To allay these fears, he strongly advocated that the country be divided into six zones, three from the South and three from the North. In a way, this has pointed at the direction where the nation is headed; hence a minority is elected to be president of Nigeria.

Of course, he was not alone in the struggle. There were also Chief Melford Okilo, Dr. Clement Isong, Chief Edwin Clark, Chief I.I. Morphy, Chief Tayo Akpata, Sen. Ahmadu Ali among many others.

Chapter



Early Life

Life for Apollos Aper Aku began in 1938 when he was born to an Evangelist father, Aku Kiso who was of the NKST denomination. He became the first civilian governor of Benue State in 1979 and died in November 1987 after he had lived for forty-nine years. Of these years, he spent seven years growing up with his parents as a child. And for seventeen years, he utilized it to build himself up with educational qualifications.

In 1948, Aper was already in his third year in the primary school. His father by this time opted to go on missionary work to Abii across the Benue River, not far from Awe in present day Nasarawa State. Because of the love for his children, the father, Aku, took Aper and Isaac to live with their guardians at Mkar, near Gboko. Aper first lived under the custody of Iorhemba Andzenge but was later moved to live with Nyikwagh Wombo. Isaac who also pursued a civil service career and rose to become a permanent secretary in the federal service was however left elsewhere.

And perhaps, there is something striking about Mkar and leadership development among the Tiv. Mkar has produced very influential Tiv leaders. Late General John-Mark Inienger was born and brought up at Mkar. So also are Senator Barnabas Andyar Iorhyer Gemade and his siblings. It is therefore not out of place that Aper grew up to rise to the stature he left as a political leader.

By 1950, he was in middle one. He was not given to failure but

ironically, all of Aku's children failed the examinations they took in 1950. One of their sisters too who was in Sev-av in Tombo district in a girl's school also failed to pass her examinations. They were made to repeat their classes. But in repeating the class, they reaped blessings as they all came top in the examinations in 1951. Aper particularly made an impressive result in his class because he was the only candidate selected from his class in Middle One to proceed to Government College, Kaduna, which was later transferred to Keffi.

From the Government College, Keffi, he moved on for his higher certificate at the Nigerian College of Arts and Science. In 1961, he gained admission to the Fourah Bay University in Sierra Leone, a historic and prestigious institution which has also nurtured the likes of Bishop Ajayi Crowther, Ransome Kuti and a host of other distinguished Nigerians who have made immeasurable contributions to the development and progress of Nigeria and indeed the West African sub-region since the inception of the school in 1827. Fourah Bay is also referred to as the "Athens of West Africa" for perhaps being a pioneer institution in the region. Three years later, he obtained a post graduate certificate in Education at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

For twenty-five years, Aper demonstrated humility and adherence to the training and upbringing he got from his father. This background aided him in his service to humanity, both in public and private life and made his tenure as governor of Benue State a success. Before becoming an envangelist, Aku Kiso married Ityongona, Aper's mother, while working with the colonialists at Abinsi, a former colonial headquarters, as a messenger to the interpreter, the Resident of Benue Province, one C. S. Pembleton.

Aper's mother, Ityongona, was first married to late Tyoor Abagi Kpanju of Shangev-Tiev. Abagi was known to be a ruthless and cruel traditional ruler. Abagi was said to have suspected one of his wives of infidelity. He would not take any of such from his wife. He killed her in the cruelest manner. This notoriety was reported to the colonial administration. He was later tried and executed by boiling him in a drum. But Abagi's daughter who resides in Gboko claims her father was hanged and not boiled. But one cannot reconcile with the notorious story of *"Fishim jii Abagi toor sha atsam atsam."* Interpreted to mean "Fishim cooked Abagi and he boiled in songs."

It was in the course of Abagi's trial that Aku fell in love with

Aper's mother, Ityongona. The marriage was delayed for reasons that Ityongona was initially bethrothed to one Ayom from Mbausu kindred in Vandeikya local government after Abagi's death but for inexplicable reasons, she was to re-marry Aku later. That union produced Angumashe (Kwandera). Ityongona's marriage to Aku also produced Joshua Kungo and Apollos Aper. In her first marriage to Abagi, she gave birth to Agbanya.

Aku's commitment to service started quite early. In 1964, after he had obtained a combined Bachelor's degree in History and English Language, he returned to Nigeria and started his public service career with the William Michael Bristow Secondary School, Gboko. The school was then located at Lupwe in old Gongola State now Taraba State.

He moved on to offer his services beyond the borders of Benue State. This took him to Bauchi where he taught at Bauchi Provincial Secondary School. He was to later become the first Principal of a new Government Secondary School located in present day Gombe State.

In 1968, Aku transferred his services to the Federal Government Service and worked in the Bureau for External Aid for Education. He was later seconded to the Federal Ministry for Establishment and posted to Kaduna as the Principal of Federal Training Centre. He showcased his leadership traits within the years he spent in the teaching profession. After retiring from public service in 1970, he was appointed in 1972 into the Governing Council of the University of Ibadan as a member. This of course may have further influenced his resolve to commit himself to improving the lives of others. It is also a trait that could be seen in his leadership during his tenure as the governor of Benue State.

His relentless crusade against corruption stood him out among his peers. No wonder, this singular determination galvanized him into a position of national prominence and popularity. His solo war against the then governor of Benue-Plateau State, Police Commissioner Joseph Deshi Gomwalk, can be said to be of significance in his rise to national prominence in political development in Nigeria.

In 1977, Aku had his first point of political leadership when he emerged as the Chairman of Kwande local government. This was after he had a brush with the military administration of Gen. Yakubu Gowon as a result of an an affidavit he swore against Gomwalk,

former Military Governor of Benue-Plateau State, a cousin to the former head of state.

For daring to stand against the might of the excesses of a government in a military regime, Aku earned for himself an unflinching support across the length and breadth of the country. But the support from his home state was just overwhelming. This of course was coupled with his association with the politics of Joseph Tarka who had become an institution in politics, not just in Benue, his home state or Middle Belt where he held sway but in Nigeria.

Aku was detained thereafter on the orders of the federal government. And in solidarity with his ideals, there were general students' demonstrations in Ibadan, Ilorin and other towns across the country. He was, however, released from detention in January 1975.

And so, when he took over in 1979 as the first executive governor of the state after his election on August 1, 1979, he was ready to steer the state away from years of deprivation and neglect which was the hallmark of the successive regimes in the state. In a bid to restore hope to the people, the former governor abolished school fees in all primary schools in Benue State as a way of encouraging parents to send their wards to school. For the post primary institutions, their school fees were slashed. Scholarships were made automatic for students who gained admission into higher institutions. In the same token, the community poll tax which had hitherto become a weapon of oppression by the tax collectors against defaulters was abolished.

A few reasons were adduced as to why Aku took that decision. First and historically, the process of enforcing tax payment was not only very oppressive but taxation was seen as an alien tradition to the Tivs. In pre-colonial times, the Tivs neither paid taxes nor tributes to any political authority. Taxation was introduced by the British colonialists to generate resources for running the colonies. In most cases, defaulters were physically assaulted and humiliated by tax collectors. Such cases abound in the late seventies in places like Gboko, Makurdi and other strategic Tiv settlements.

And perhaps, for his pursuit of the emancipation struggle, Aku decided against over-labouring the people of the state who were just recovering from the pains of a defective military regime. His other reason was that, as a good manager of men and resources, he believed he could achieve much without revenues from personal

income taxes. He might have been driven by compassion for the downtrodden in the land and the low incomes of the mass of the people. Even with this, his opponents saw all of it as an attempt to score some political points ahead of his re-election in 1983.

Ironically, taxation became a measure for social status in Tivland. It was embarrassing to be exempted from taxation and those who made the list were regarded as ne'er-do-wells. Only the dregs of society, the mentally ill and very aged persons were made tax-exempt. Curiously, women made the list of *"ior mba yange i dugh sha kpande yo"* (those who were exempted from paying tax) even where they had independent incomes. Therefore, Aku's decision to *"dugh Tiv sha kpande"* was regarded in some quarters as contemptible.

One of Aku's rare leadership traits was his ability to resolve some knotty issues through dialogue and persuasion. It was this approach that made him never to lose sight of the development plans he had for the state.

In a fashion typical of his anti-corruption stance, Aku left office with an uncompleted bungalow which he built with a loan he had not even liquidated before he died in 1987. The accruals from that loan made the crediting bank to drag the family of the late governor to court and had the wife's only serviceable Peugeot 505 saloon car to be attached by the court for auctioning. It was the timely intervention of Dominic Oneya, a retired Brig-Gen. who was the military administrator of Benue State at the time, that saved the situation.

As a family man, he was married to Mbateren Fidelia Aku and Victoria Aku. He had five children: Two boys and three girls. They are Mbaoon, Akua, Ahura, Mbarumun and Mbatsuwen.

Chapter

2

A Crusader to the Rescue

In 1974, the ethnic conflict among the major tribal groups in the old Benue-Plateau State began to heat up to a fevered pitch. This was generated by perceived nepotism that characterized the administration of Police Commissioner Joseph Deshi Gomwalk as the governor. There was complete distrust between the tribes that made up old Benue against their fellow Plateau indigenes. Allegations of lopsidedness in Gomwalk's government fuelled this animosity the more. This mistrust had to do with the way Gomwalk made his appointments and even the siting of key government institutions.

This created the platform that gave rise to the open confrontation against him. In September 1974, Aper Aku, who was then a business man based in Gboko, Benue State, swore to a 26-point affidavit alleging corrupt use of power against Gomwalk. Aku had alleged, in his petition, that the former Benue-Plateau State governor's government had awarded a contract to the tune of ₦5, 320,000.00 to a company without going through the Tenders Board because of the interest of the governor's relations in the company. Aku also alleged that Gomwalk had had improper association with Voteniski, a construction company based in Jos, and also an Insurance firm. Besides, Aku accused Gomwalk of "tribalism, favouritism and illegal acquisition of wealth."

Gomwalk, on his part, put up a stout defence against these allegations. In his response through his Principal Private Secretary, Alhaji I.R. Abubakar, Gomwalk claimed that he and his relations, like every other Nigerian, had a right to "legitimate ownership of property." He denied other acts of impropriety leveled against him. He regretted that, in spite of substantial progress made in the state through his efforts, Aku painted him in bad light through the affidavits. Gomwalk described the allegations contained in the affidavit as "malicious, a distortion of facts, and untrue".

Governor Gomwalk's statement was issued in Jos, Tuesday September 3, 1974. He insisted that he had, at no time, improperly associated himself with Voteniski (Nigeria) Limited or any other company, and that he had, at no time, misused his position to amass wealth for himself or for any of his relations.

The statement explained that the governor did not, at any time, abuse the procedure for the award of contracts, and emphasized that he and his relations and any other Nigerians were entitled to legitimate ownership of property. It promised that a more detailed answer to the points raised in the affidavit would be given in due course.

The full text of Gomwalk's statement reads:

> The attention of the Military Governor of Benue- Plateau State, Police Commissioner J. Gomwalk, has been drawn to a news item published in some of the national dailies and to the text of an affidavit said to be sworn by one Aper Aku.
>
> The allegations contained in these newspaper publications and affidavit, I am authorized to say, are malicious, distortion of facts and untrue. The military Governor has at no time improperly associated himself with Voteniski (Nig) Ltd; he has, at no time, misused his position to amass wealth for himself or for any of his relatives. I am further authorized to say that the military governor has not, at any time, abused the procedure for award of contracts. The military governor and his relatives, as any other Nigerians, are entitled to legitimate ownership of property. A more detailed answer to the points raised in the affidavit will be given in the course.
>
> It is a pity that His Excellency, the Military Governor, who has worked selflessly to see to the progress of Benue-Plateau State in particular and the unity of Nigeria as a whole should now be so portrayed. (New Nigerian 7/9/1974).

But Gomwalk's response fuelled a flurry of editorials in major national dailies. In the *Sunday Times* of September 8, 1974, the paper wrote: "The question was not one of legitimacy to acquire ownership of property but of the propriety of the acquisitions."

As the Aku-Gomwalk saga raged, there was public outcry that the Head of State, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, who hailed from the same ethnic tribe as Gomwalk and seen more as his protégé, should clear his position on the matter. By this time, the former Head of State was getting set to travel to Peking, China, where he was scheduled for a state visit. It was at this time too that Gomwalk was invited to Dodan Barracks in Lagos where he held a closed door meeting with Gen. Gowon.

Shortly after that meeting, the then Head of State acquitted Gomwalk of all the allegations leveled against him by Aku. All these transpired in less than 48 hours. Apart from dismissing Aku's allegations against Gomwalk, Gowon told a bewildered nation that his confidence in Gomwalk was unshaken. On the allegations by Aku, Gowon said;

> I am now satisfied after listening to explanations and having had time to check all the relevant references provided by Gomwalk, that he had not been guilty of any wrongdoings as alleged by Mr. Aku in his affidavit. (*Daily Times* September 9, 1974).

In view of the interest generated by the public in the corruption allegations, Gowon said he had directed Gomwalk to release to the press, detailed explanations on the issue. But in the same breath, the Head of State warned the press and the courts not to be used as instruments of blackmail against public officials to tarnish their image.

With this in mind, Gowon was said to have reviewed the explanation made in writing by Gomwalk and copied to other top members of the Supreme Military Council like Major General Hassan Katsina. As he was about to depart for China on a state visit, he publicly declared Gomwalk innocent of all the allegations, explaining that he had looked into the allegations and cross-checked references and found no evidence of guilt. He also asked Gomwalk to publish his defence publicly, which he never did.

Gowon had, sometime in 1970, promised to set up Special Corruption Tribunals to try some of his governors and federal

commissioners to stave off what was now emerging as a pattern of blackmail against government functionaries. But his decision in handling the Gomwalk allegations personally created more problems for him. It was the over protection of Gomwalk and other military officers in his government that nailed him. As a strategy, the 'defence' of Gomwalk ought to have been presented to an independent judicial panel and all the processes allowed to playout. Others were of the opinion that a third party, preferably a legal institution and not Gowon as the Head of State, who was directly related to Gomwalk, ought to have declared the former military governor innocent.

The public reaction against Gowon's defence of Gomwalk continued to build up even while he was still in China. It was a serious embarrassment to him and his delegation. Gowon began to suspect, rightly, that there were some forces behind the rising wave of sworn affidavits against officials in his government. It was indeed an orchestrated strategy to pressurize the Head of State to change some of his governors.

As a fallout from Aku's petition, two Tiv Commissioners in Gomwalk's cabinet; Chia Surma who was then Commissioner of Information and his counterpart in charge of Trade and Industries, Daniel Humbe, were sent on compulsory leave.

But Gomwalk told reporters at the Jos airport on his way to Lagos that insinuations that the duo were sent on leave were mere rumours. He said the two were in fact on vacation according to their leave roster prepared for all commissioners and permanent secretaries in the state. He warned people in the State to desist from "spreading unfounded rumours" because, according to him, such is capable of causing disaffection among the people of the state.

Aku was thereafter arrested and detained in Jos prison at the instance of the military government and later transferred to Kaduna. During his incarceration, nobody was allowed to visit him. At this time too, there was general students' demonstrations across the country protesting Aku's detention.

Gowon was under pressure to deal with the issue but his insistence that Gomwalk was innocent increased the anger of the people. On December 17, 1974, the former Head of State told journalists at the Ikeja airport that "no amount of press or public pressure will stampede the federal military government into any precipitable action over the detained Gboko businessman, Mr Aper

Aku or any other citizen for that matter." He said Aku was being detained for security reasons. In response to another question, Gowon retorted, "Forget Aku, we'll release him when we are satisfied." He went on to warn that anyone "interested in creating trouble in the country will suffer for the consequences of his action. What will you do if there was bloodshed in that area as a result of what Aper Aku did?" (*Daily Times* December 19, 1974: 19).

To enforce the fundamental rights of her husband, Mrs. Fidelia Mbateren Aku, wife of Mr. Aper Aku, filed a writ of Habeas Corpus at a Jos High Court. In the writ No. JD/15M/74 filed on her behalf by Mr. Ogaba Ede, a Jos based lawyer, Mrs. Aku demanded that her husband be released. The writ alleged that Aku was invited to Jos by a plain clothes police officer with a promise to return him the following day. It further stated that after the family had waited for five days without the husband returning home, she went to Jos where she learnt that her husband had been detained and nobody was allowed to see him. She too, was not allowed to see him.

When the writ came up on September 4, 1974, Justice D.L. Bate of the Jos High Court while ruling ordered that the Commissioner of Police for Benue-Plateau State and the Commander of the Third Infantry Division of the Nigerian Army to appear before him on Monday September 9, 1974 and show cause why Aku should not be released from detention. Mrs. Aku's attempt to challenge the illegal detention of her husband was still in the works when Aku was released in the afternoon of Friday September 6, 1974, after spending six days in detention.

In the same way, eight out of the nine officials of the state's Ministry of Information, Cultural and Internal Affairs, who were also detained by the police in Jos in connection with the circulation of Aku's petition, were also released. They were arrested on August 22, 1974. The ninth person, Innocent Akaza, was not even seen immediately and that kind of put his immediate family in pains.

As if to say 'thank you' to the media for standing by him, Aku paid a surprise visit to the head office of *New Nigerian* newspaper in Kaduna for a chat with the editor after he was released from detention.

In an interview with the editors of the newspaper, Aku denied that his affidavit was neither politically motivated nor calculated to embarrass the Federal Military Government.

As a patriotic Nigerian, he insisted that the Benue-Plateau State

military governor had compromised his office by allegedly getting involved in the wrongdoings contained in his affidavit. Though Aku would not call on the Head of State to revoke Governor Gomwalk's appointment, he believed that it was in the best interest of the nation for the governor to take the initiative.

At the interview with the *New Nigerian* editors, Aku was asked if his affidavit had anything to do with the Tarka-Daboh affair. But he snapped: "I categorically say, no." He insisted that he had never been involved in any business deals with any of the people mentioned in his affidavit. And so he refused to be drawn into discussing how he came about the facts contained in his affidavit, saying that "This is something I will still like to keep to myself."

Aku had, on May 29, 1974, written a letter to the Head of State in which he complained about the way Governor Gomwalk was running the affairs of the State. The letter gave both Gomwalk and Gen. Gowon a rude shock when it was discovered that copies of his letter were circulated in the state. Things reached a climax when Aku received a letter from the Benue-Plateau State government abusing him for putting into writing his complaints against the governor. With these facts in his hands, he decided to go to court and swear to an affidavit.

Perhaps owing to some thinking from the corridors of power, Aku told the editors that the police cleverly avoided issues relating to his affidavit during his interrogation. But he would not be cajoled to disclose the nature of questions put to him by the Police. He would also not reveal the terms under which he was released. He disclosed, however, that he was given a decent treatment by the police and added that he was allowed a doctor for routine medical check-up.

One other strategy he declined to reveal was what he intended to do in his next line of action on the affidavit which had gained so much currency in the polity across the nation. Aku was not moved by threats from Dr. Alexander Fom, who had threatened to take legal actions over the portion of the affidavit that concerned him and the Benue-Plateau Construction Company Limited. He advised Fom to make good his threat.

Fom had claimed in his counter-affidavit No 1 Vol 5, 1975 that:

> We have an implicit and unshaken faith and confidence in His Excellency, the Military Governor of Benue-Plateau State, in the person of Mr. J. D. Gomwalk. He is a man of integrity who is

> dedicated to the cause of the poor man in this state and country as a whole and it is most wicked of any man to have to fabricate stories either to bring his government to disrepute or to tarnish the good name of his government and calculated to move the hands of the moving clock back for the smooth development of the State and to cause sectionalism among the peace-loving people of this part of the country. However, I personally challenge Mr. Aper Aku to substantiate all his allegations within seven days.

While all this was going on, the Benue-Plateau State Police Command gave reasons why Aku was arrested and detained. The then Police Commissioner, L.C Meme, in a press statement issued by the Police Public Relations Office of the Command on Friday, September 6, 1974, denied media reports that the arrest of Aku was in connection with the affidavit he had sworn to, alleging wrongdoings against the Military Governor of the State, Police Commissoner J.D. Gomwalk.

The police official statement explained that Aku was arrested because of a letter he (Aku) wrote earlier, which the police considered "capable of causing disaffection among the various communities in the state, as well as lead to a breakdown of law and order." It alleged that Aku distributed copies of the letter almost from house to house in all the divisional areas of the state, adding that even the commonest person in the street got a copy.

The full text of the statement reads:

> The attention of the Commissioner of Police, Benue-Plateau State Command, has been drawn to the publication in some national newspapers of 3rd September, 1974, which gave the impression that Mr. Aper Aku has been arrested by the Police because he swore to an affidavit containing certain allegations against the Military Governor of Benue-Plateau State, Mr. J.D. Gomwalk.
>
> The Commissioner of Police wishes to make it clear that this is totally untrue. The truth is that Mr. Aper Aku had since 28th August, 1974, been asked through the Divisional Police Officer, Gboko, to report to the Commissioner of Police, Jos, in connection with a letter he wrote earlier about the Benue-Plateau State Government which he was circulating almost from house to house in all the divisional areas of the state. He reported himself at the Police Headquarters on Saturday, 31st August, 1974 and is being questioned in connection with the mass circulation of the said

> letter which is considered capable of causing disaffection among the various communities in the state, as well as lead to a breakdown of law and order.
>
> The commissioner wishes to stress the fact that the police did not know that Mr. Aper had sworn to an affidavit until Monday 2nd September, 1974.
>
> The state's Commissioner of Police, Mr. L.C. Meme, was the one who in fact took the trouble of telephoning the full text of his statement (above) to the acting editor of the *New Nigerian*, Alhaji Tukur Othman, at the latter's request." (*New Nigerian*; 7/9/1974).

In an interview shortly afterwards, Police Commissioner Meme told the acting editor of the *New Nigerian* newspaper that the police were not bothered much with the publication of Aku's sworn affidavit in the newspaper the previous day because, according to him, "It has nothing to do with us." Meme pointed out that what was of concern to the Police was the mass distribution of the letter written by Mr. Aku, which the former Police Commissioner claimed contained allegations against the Benue-Plateau State Government and was injurious to the person of the governor and for a fact threatened the security of the state. And the most disturbing thing about Aku's letter, according to the police, was that "even the commonest person in the street got a copy." He added that nobody cared as much with the content of the letter as with its mass distribution.

During his short stay in the custody of the police, Aku took ill because of his diabetic condition but received medical attention regularly from a doctor that attended to him.

There was a twist added to the Aku/Gomwalk saga when the judiciary was brought in to cover government officials who indulged in underhand deals in the discharge of their official functions. Dr. Teslim Elias, then Federal Commissioner for Justice and Attorney-General, announced that the Judicial Advisory Committee had decided that the judiciary should no longer accept such affidavits "unless such affidavits are in respect of any proceedings in court." They had argued that deposition of affidavits by individuals was not in itself a "privileged" action.

The announcement by Elias had the effect of creating an impression that the Gowon administration was hell bent on protecting, not only governors or federal commissioners but that it had perfected the art to hide suspected indiscretions. The public

rose up with one voice that there was an appearance of "cover-up."

Elias and his team argued that "It is not generally realized that sworn affidavits do not by themselves confer any privilege or immunity on their respondents". Consequently, the committee enjoined that "no affidavit should be allowed to be sworn before public officers including Commissioners for Oaths, unless such affidavits were required in respect of any proceedings in Court." This official cover on the part of government gave public officials the leeway to corruptly enrich themselves without being challenged.

It was obvious at that time that the Nigerian mass media was on the side of Aku through its analysis and reports. For instance, *The Daily Times* in an editorial in its edition of 13th September, 1974, titled "Unanswered Questions", thoroughly analyzed Aku's allegations as against Gomwalk's response and declared that, notwithstanding Gomwalk's defence, "there are question marks on how he saved ₦10, 000.00 to buy Treasury Bills; how his brothers' relationship with BEPCO affected the award of Government contracts to BEPCO and what tax he paid on his property. It is the view of the *Daily Times* that these are matters that should be referred to a judicial commission of inquiry without prejudice to the fact that the Head of State (Gowon) has found no prima facie case of corruption or impropriety against him."

The *Nigerian Tribune* of September 14, 1974 was more ruthless in its comments against Gomwalk. The paper argued that, while it conceded that the governor might not be guilty in respect of some of the charges against him, particularly that relating to purchase of treasury bills, it said it was clearly of the view that the governor had not discharged himself of Mr. Aku's charges, particularly that relating to the award of contracts to Voteniski (Nig.) Limited. In the view of the newspaper. "If 2 million naira represents 10 per cent of the value of the contracts, it is safe to infer that the total cost is 20 million naira. It is improper for a military governor to award a contract of that magnitude without reference to both the Tenders Board and the executive committee of the state."

It was more worrisome, said the paper, that the military governor would engage in what it described as "stupendous gubernatorial indiscretion" in the awards of contracts to a particular company and the way money was paid to it without regard to work done. "Throughout the federation, and in all civilised countries," argued

the paper, "a contractor may be paid a percentage of the contract price in advance, but all subsequent payments are subject to the execution by the contractor of an agreed level of work. It is a standardized practice in Nigeria that a site engineer of the government has to issue a valuation certificate before payment is made on each occasion". The paper queried, "Why did Mr. Gomwalk depart from this practice?"

Gomwalk himself was not short of explanations. He had stated that payments were made irrespective of the work done and that this procedure was adopted to enable government, with its meagre finances, arrange with banks to make regular payments to contractors.

It was indeed a very curious way of saving the tax payers money, said *The Tribune*. The paper then argued that, "if a contractor was paid 90 per cent of the price for his work and he had only gone half way and was incapable of completing the contract, there was nothing the government could do except to go to court."

In the eyes of many, the sum total of Gomwalk's defence was faulty to claim that he did not use his influence to promote the affluence of his brothers and their wives. It was all very curious to know that Mrs. Helen Gomwalk, Clement's wife, even with her qualifications, could earn ₦6, 000.00 as the Chief Administrative Officer of a private company. This was the salary of a Permanent Secretary at that time. It was all too glaring that no other woman with Helen's qualifications could be paid that much in the open market, which suggested that Voteniski Nigeria Limited must have had a special reason for paying so fantastic a salary to an administrative officer.

Of course, no one advocated that because their younger brother was governor, nobody in the Gomwalk family and their wives or children should forfeit their rights as citizens of Nigeria. But what was evident from the counter-affidavits deposed to by Jonathan and Clement was that most of their wealth at the time came to them between 1966 and 1974 when their brother became the military governor. The question that arose as a result of this was whether the affluence of the Gomwalk family during this period was all by accident? Definitely not! From the events that followed, Gen. Gowon was toppled on July 29th, 1975 by Gen. Murtala Mohammed while attending Organisation of African Unity summit in Uganda, thus proving the substance of Aku's charges against

Gomwalk.

In general, except for a few Tiv elites, the late Gomwalk had already incurred the greatest disapproval of the Tivs by his biased acts aimed at balkanizing Tivland. It is in truth therefore and indeed on record that he died with the knowledge that majority of the Tivs disapproved of his administration and actions.

The Justice Alfa Belgore Panel

After Gen. Yakubu Gowon was overthrown in a military coup in 1975, Col Abdullahi Mohammed was appointed the military Governor of Benue-Plateau State. On September 2nd, 1975, the Military Governor appointed a panel under the chairmanship of Justice Alfa Belgore and two other members. They included Mr. A.M Elahi, a Chief Irrigation Engineer and Mr. V.K. Dangin, Commercial Controller, Nigerian Merchants Limited to investigate, among other things, the disposal of Benue-Plateau houses in Kaduna and Jos and the procedure used in awarding major contracts in the state since 1970. Mr. B.A. Bur served as secretary to the panel.

The terms of reference of the panel were:-

(i) to find out the number and details of houses in Jos area, which were bought and then sold to individuals during the implementation of the indigenization Decree other than those houses which were declared by the state Ministry of Trade and Co-operatives in their letter to the military government;

(ii) to find out why audit queries or the transactions in respect of the houses sold by the State Government were not answered by the ministry;

(iii) to find out the circumstances surrounding the loss of Ministry of Works file on Interim Common Services Agency houses allocated to Benue-Plateau in Kaduna;

(iv) to determine the actual number of Interim Common Services Agency houses allocated to Benue-Plateau State in Kaduna by checking from the Interim Common Services Agency secretariat in Kaduna and the military governor's office in Jos;

(v) to confirm the ownership of all the houses at present;

(vi) to confirm that all the houses alleged to have been sold to

North-Central state government and other government Institutions were actually sold to them and that they are still in possession of the houses;

(vii) to inquire into the operations of the State Tenders Board with particular reference to the Board's attitude towards technical experts advice from the Ministry of Works;

(viii) to collect, tabulate and comment on all available documents in respect of all contracts awarded to BEPCO, Plateau Construction Ltd, Tilley Gyado & Sons and any other contractors since 1970;

(ix) to find out why all major contracts since 1970 have been negotiated rather than awarded on the basis of competitive tender;

(x) to confirm the truth, or otherwise, of allegations that G. CAPPA Ltd quoted for the State Secretariat building but lost the job to BEPCO even though its quotation was ₦1,000,000.00 less than that of BEPCO;

(xi) to identify any particular officer found to have been careless or irresponsible in any contract transactions and to ascertain the degree of carelessness or irresponsibility;

(xii) to make necessary recommendations which the panel considers to be relevant to its terms of reference and in the public interest;

Two terms of reference were added to the panel as follows:-

(i) to investigate the circumstances surrounding the loss of cement in the Ministry of Works and the loss of flour in the Ministry of Trade and Industry in 1971/1972 financial year and to apportion responsibilities for the losses;

(ii) to investigate the circumstances surrounding the loss of a Peugeot car in the Ministry of Finance and a Land Rover in the Ministry of Works in 1971/72 financial year and to apportion responsibilities for the losses.

By December 1975, when Justice Belgore turned in the report of the panel, a damning verdict was passed on the administration of Police Commissioner Gomwalk. The panel found out that Gomwalk was indeed guilty of corruption, nepotism and favouritism. The panel also found that the former governor's record was an "ignoble

arrangement to waste government money and therefore gain from such wastage himself, his cronies and family."(*The Nigerian Standard*, December 2, 1975)

According to the panel's report, Gomwalk's behaviour while in office "was a disgrace to the Nigerian Police Force, the reputation of the Nigerian Administrative Service and integrity of educated Africans." It declared further; "it is a tragedy of unequalled proportions to find that a graduate, former administrative officer, clothed in the uniform of the police and functioning as a military governor with all the powers of the legislature and executive in his hands was acting as a common criminal with hardly anybody to challenge him."

Belgore further noted that even when the former governor was challenged by Aper Aku, the allegations against him were summarily dismissed by the former Head of State, Yakubu Gowon, who never allowed a hearing of the whole affair, although those allegations were grave enough to justify his removal from office.

The panel traced Gomwalk's misconduct in office, to the almost total loss of confidence in his style of government when he consistently lied in the daily running of the affairs of government to the extent that his ambition to hoard money and acquire properties made him intolerant to honest advice from people who genuinely had the interest of the state at heart.

The panel found out that, as at May 1967 when Gomwalk took over as the military governor of Benue-Plateau State, he had only ₦200.00 in his savings account and ₦430.00 in his current account. The panel members conceded that "Gomwalk started off well" because "in 1967 when he tried to bring all sections of the state together by building up an administrative service virtually from the scratch. By 1970, he came across George Okon through Paul Unongo and the history of his government took a different turn."

Okon was accused by the panel of having absolute control over Gomwalk, hence he "advised him on projects, appointment of commissioners and their removal; promotion, demotion and transfers of top civil servants, choice of persons to be in favour or disfavour and was his money supplier through Voteniski and Psychoman Consultants. It was through these two companies, according to the Belgore report that the former governor "satisfied his insatiable love for money."

The panel also found out that 'Dr.' George Okon was a "phoney" and had obtained only elementary school certificate. He never had any degrees not to talk of a doctorate.

The former governor was not alone in the corrupt enrichment bazaar. Apart from Okon, there was Dr. Alex Fom, as well as Jonathan, and Clement Gomwalk, his blood relations. Fom was accused of "criminal breach of trust" who also indulged in "an extravagant living" with a loan profile of ₦106m. BEPCO, the company that was used by Gomwalk and others was to refund, among other things, the sum of ₦773,000.00 while Jonathan was asked to refund ₦59,000.00 borrowed from BEPCO. Their properties were recommended to be forfeited to government.

More shocking revelations came from the Belgore panel. For instance, it was discovered that during the 1972/73 farming season, the Benue-Plateau State government gave out contracts for the purchase of fertilizers for distribution to farmers to a number of firms. The panel found out that the bulk of the fertilizers supplied by Messrs Jos Farms and Atayi Chemists were those caught up by the Nigerian Civil War and were lying at the quay sides in Calabar and Port Harcourt.

These fertilizers were already found to have deteriorated considerably after the war and were meant to be dumped into the sea when the two firms collected and delivered them to the Benue-Plateau State government. And despite the condition of the fertilizers supplied, H. S. Gogwin, who was the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Natural Resources, took delivery of these commodities and authorized payment. The panel frowned on the conduct of this officer and described him as 'a very dirty crook whose selfish ambition to make improper gains inflicted untold sufferings on farmers in the state over the years.' The panel also indicted the attitude of Alhaji Ibrahim Gadu, whom it described as an experienced man in the Ministry of Agriculture but preferred to 'behave improperly.'

Justice Belgore, in the report, also blamed Mr. Lot who was the Chief Agricultural Officer in the ministry and head of the unit dealing with fertilizers at the time. The report said Lot was aware of the fertilizer situation but chose to do nothing against the manipulation of Gogwin, Dzungwe and Alhaji Gadu. It was further discovered by the panel that a fertilizer racket blossomed in the ministry. For instance, a bag of fertilizer was purchased by businessmen at ₦2.00

from the ministry's stores and later bought back by the same ministry at ₦6.00 per bag. The panel, in its findings, discovered that a total of ₦571, 652.00 was spent by the ministry to buy grains without reference or approval of the state Tenders Board. Arewa Chemists, which was one of the firms that won the fertilizer contract, said the report, "never supplied anything and despite several reminders" the company kept mute and the money paid to the company was never recovered until the Belgore panel recommended so.

Apart from fertilizers supplied by BASF, a German company, none of the other companies took the trouble to import the commodity from the countries of manufacture but were "merely scavenging for old, useless fertilizers from various neighbouring states." As a result of this, the state government was unable to meet its obligations to supply fertilizers to farmers.

It was a result of these startling revelations that the panel recommended the retirement of six other officers for their roles in the various findings by the panel. They were two permanent secretaries; C. B. Gomwalk and Alhaji Yahaya Kwande; a deputy permanent secretary, J.H Dzungwe; a Principal Assistant Secretary, Mr. B Dusu; a Senior Assistant Education Officer, Mr. H.S. Gogwin and Alhaji Ibrahim Gadu.

To forestall any court proceedings against the outcome of the panel's report or any other one after that, the military government of Col. Abdullahi Mohammed issued an edict-BPS No 13 of 1975- "The Bar to Certain Proceedings Edict, 1975" and published in an extraordinary gazette said where such a suit has been filed, it should be declared null and void.

The Edict states:

> No proceedings whether civil or criminal, shall lie or be instituted in any court for or on account of or in connection with any statement issued or made or purported to be issued or made by a panel. Where any such proceeding has been instituted before, on or after the commencement of this Edict, the proceedings shall abate and be discharged and be void. The provisions of the Edict applied to every white paper or any publication whatsoever that was issued or purported to be issued by the state government.

The former military governor was recommended to the Supreme Military Council for necessary punitive measures. Gomwalk and other military governors and federal commissioners in Gen. Gowon's

regime were sent on compulsory retirement for various degrees of complicity in corruption while in office. *(The Nigeria Standard,* December 3, 1975).

Chapter

3

Winning the 1979 NPN Ticket

It was in December 1976 that elections into local government councils in Tivland were conducted. At that time, moves were made by political groups disposed to either J.S. Tarka or Paul Unongo to fill in candidates who belonged to their camps for the elections. This was a test rehearsal for the anticipated return to democratic rule by the two leading political gladiators in Tiv politics at that time. As a matter of fact, some of the candidates did not belong to any of the two groups, but immediately after the elections, there were overtures to such candidates to win them over.

And because chairmen of councils were not elected separately, the horse trading continued, each group trying to outsmart the other. But going by the electoral edict in Benue State at that time, the state governor had the prerogative to choose from among the elected politicians who should be the chairman. The outcome of this exercise in Kwande local government, like in other local governments, did not go down well with those sympathetic to Unongo when Aper Aku was appointed instead of Paul Loko, who scored majority of votes in the election. This was why supporters of Unongo accused Suemo Chia, then Commissioner for Local Government, of working for the interest of Tarka. Aku scored 8 votes as against 11 votes got by Paul Loko, a staunch Unongo supporter.

Loko, thereafter, petitioned the federal government. His petition

was widely published in the national dailies. In it, he accused the Benue State Government of an active encouragement of democratic rape. The petition was copied to the then Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo.

Unknown to many, the local government edict of the state had empowered the State Government to choose anybody of their choice among the elected councillors, irrespective of whether he had the majority votes or not, provided the government considers such a person capable for the post of chairmanship. By this implications, therefore, the government's action was right and the will of the majority discountenanced. The exercise was one of those surprises to people who didn't know that democracy and autocracy could function together for the smooth running of a government.

Immediately after the election of chairmen, the Unongo group protested. They accused the government of taking sides to favour those suspected to be political allies of Tarka. Paul Loko's anger against this political injustice may have informed his decision to level false allegations against Aku afterwards when party politics returned. He had accused Aku of personally going to Gboko main market to lead riots against Igbo traders, and in the process, steal an iron bed. Loko had also alleged that Aku hired the services of one Christopher Akinde for the purpose of organising violence and riots in Gboko town and other towns in the state. Of course, Loko was, on July 20, 1982, jailed to a total of 12 months imprisonment by a Gboko High Court presided over by late Justice Lawrence Anoliefo for sedition. He was also to be forced later to dump the NPP and join the NPN as a soft landing for him.

Aku was elected chairman of Kwande local government council in 1977. That period may as well be regarded as a period of apprenticeship. He was self-critical of all his actions. He gauged his actions in office principally on his pedigree as an anti corruption crusader. Of course, the entire nation was watching him prove himself and live above board.

As chairman of Kwande local government, Aku demonstrated rare leadership abilities, as he was said to be extra careful in his official and private dealings. Mvendaga Jibo, in his book, *Tiv Politics Since 1959,* writes that 'Aku was conscious of the opposition against him in the council because of the presence of Unongo loyalists. He would not accept gifts while on official tours. But if he did, he would sell the items and pay the proceeds to the local government treasury.'

That is why by the time Aku left office, there was a lot of evidence to show that his efforts as Chairman of the local government council were successful. In 1978, when Abdullahi Shelleng set up a committee to assess all the 13 local councils and see which of the councils was able to utilize funds allocated to them optimally to the development of the area, Kwande local government that Aku presided over as chairman came first. He was named the best performing chairman in the state.

This made him have a feeling that it will not be too much out of the way if he could set himself the task of becoming the governor of Benue State and try to improve upon some aspects of development that he felt strongly needed attention.

Aku, however, never thought of jumping up to higher responsibilities in Nigeria's political leadership, even as some of his contemporaries thought he should have done. He once told the now rested news magazine, *New Times,* that he had never given it a thought of jumping up to some higher political responsibility without first of all garnering the needed experience, "Not even the office of the presidency without following it precept upon precept," he insisted.

His decision to contest for the local government election, therefore, was for him to start building from the ground up. The local government election came almost about the same time when some of his contemporaries were angling to go to the Constituent Assembly that prepared the ground for the return to democracy in 1979.

Aku's response to enquiries, why he contested for the local government elections then was that, it is always important for a politician worth his salt to establish a home base first. This is the reason why he opted for the local government chairmanship of Kwande local government in 1977 when he was faced with that option and membership of the Constituent Assembly.

He was quoted by the magazine that he preferred to go to the local government and never gave a thought to go to the Constituent Assembly at any time because:

> I wanted to develop as a politician if the civilians were going to come back to power. And I had no experience in way of knowing the local people because anyone wishing to be somebody has to have a base. This is why I chose to go to the local council. Some

people went to the Assembly. Some went with no prior experience; some were those who had been long in politics.

That was his difference with other politicians at the time and even now. For those who had no experience, they may have made very useful contributions, but they lacked the grassroots connection and completely miscalculated what was at home. So naturally, that gave him an advantage over quite a number of people when, in 1978, he decided to run for governorship. He found it easier to get closer to the people. Then of course his party, the NPN was well accepted. Some people missed their opportunities because they were so removed from the people. With this, the people became suspicious and were not responding to them.

There are various accounts on how Aku emerged to become the candidate of the NPN in 1978 and later, as the governor of Benue State in 1979. But in all of these, getting the NPN nomination in 1979 was not an easy ride for Aku. One account told by Uji, who said it was narrated to him by Aku personally, has it that when Aku began nursing the ambition to be governor of Benue State, he knew that he could not attain this height without the blessing of the political godfather at that time, Tarka. He also knew that his loyalty was totally to him as the political leader. That was why in 1977, he travelled to meet Tarka in Lagos and seek his blessings. Senator Suemo Chia corroborated this version with what Vincent Uji said about how Aku met Tarka at his residence in Lagos.

Tarka was on his way out when Aku arrived. Aku waited for Tarka until past midnight when the politician returned. Aku stayed awake waiting to discuss with him. When Tarka returned, they discussed frankly and Aku sought Tarka's endorsement to be governor of Benue State "under his party."

At that time, parties were not yet formed, but the political class was meeting in clandestine cells according to varying degree of political interests as movements. So when the National Movement of which Tarka was a key mover became a party, Aku reminded Tarka again of his ambition. As at that time, none of Tarka's associates in the UMBC had gone to him to seek clearance for the seat. Perhaps, they felt that theirs would just be for the asking and they will be endorsed.

The general thinking within the UMBC fold, which dominated the NPN then, was that Isaac Shaahu would go for the governorship

seat without much fuss. It was in that light that Tarka was said to have asked Shaahu on some occasions what his ambition was in the forthcoming elections when the ban on partisan politics will be lifted. On all occasions, Shaahu was said to have told Tarka that he had not made up his mind. It was at this point, insiders insisted, that Tarka decided to endorse Aku who had long sought for his blessings. From then on, Tarka referred Aku to his political associates. And these people were all over Tivland.

By the time Shaahu too became interested in the governorship seat, he met a brick wall in Tarka, who told him that he had already committed himself to Aku and that he had promised that he would never oppose Aku's candidature. Besides, he wondered why Shaahu could not tell him this all along and never asked to be governor.

Shaahu refused to give up. He came back and rallied round the old UMBC stalwarts who were leaders of the NPN to his side. "Some of us who were with Shaahu in the Northern Assembly were with him at the beginning but when Tarka endorsed Aku, we all left Shaahu and queued behind Aku. A lot more were still opposed to his candidature but already, Tarka had spoken and there was nothing to change," Ugbah Uyeh told the author in an interview.

Tarka further gave Aku's candidature an edge over others when he said he was paying back to Kwande what Jato Aka did to him. There are unconfirmed insinuations that the late sage, Jato Aka, anointed Tarka and made him tower above his peers early in his political life to become the leader of the Tiv and indeed a national figure at a very young age.

Again, Tarka was said to have told his followers that he needed someone who would be articulate and objective enough to handle Tivland even in his absence, that he was not going to be available to sort out problems at home. At that time, nobody had the inkling that the man was sick or that he was sick and might die very soon. He led the campaigns, presented Aku all over Tivland and went back to join the national campaigns of former president Shagari.

With all of these, some Tarka loyalists, who had been with him right from the days of the UMBC believed they should be given the opportunity without contestation. Shaahu was particularly so vehement about this and he did not hide his feelings when he failed to get the party's ticket. He saw Aku as a usurper. Shaahu's sympathy from the older politicians in the NPN that came with him from the UMBC to be governor remained.

Before Aku could survive the contest, a handwritten letter by J. A. Amaichigh to Isaac Shaahu, dated December 1, 1978 at the instance of Tarka, made the rounds within the ranks of the party. The letter circulated like wild fire. Predictably, Shaahu dismissed the letter, insisting it was forged. But Tarka himself could not come out to disclaim its contents. The letter was said to have made magic, that the Idoma and Igala caucuses could not be swayed away from what Tarka had decided.

The letter reads:

> Dear Isaac,
>
> I am directed by Chief J.S. Tarka to contact you and implore you to stop your campaign for governorship and give your support to Aper Aku.
>
> The deputy governorship is to go to Igala in the person of Isa Odoma.
>
> I could have been home at your meeting, but unfortunately, I have had a car break down in Benin. Therefore, I have written this letter and have asked Peter Acka to deliver it personally to you.
>
> Please, inform Mr. Atim Atedze to do the same. We have other plans for him after the election.
>
> My best regards to you and your family. Pat and I wish you a happy Christmas in advance.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> J.A. Amaichigh

And so by the time the NPN party nomination had been concluded, Aku won. He had defeated Isaac Shaahu and George Atim Atedze by a wide margin. This was after the duo refused to accede to the shadow elections held at Tarka's Gboko residence. They insisted that, notwithstanding the outcome of the caucus endorsement of Aku, they would still go ahead in the contest proper. But of course, they were roundly floored by Aku.

But the battle was not over yet for Aku. His ambition to be governor was threatened because of allegations by the UMBC elements against him. They accused Aku of plotting to create a third political force outside of the Tarka and Unongo groups known

in Tiv politics. He was also accused of preferring young and educated Tiv politicians to contest the 1979 elections against the favoured Tarka tradition of political apprenticeship. At three different times, Tarka initiated moves to replace Aku with another candidate.

Perhaps, Tarka too may not have contemplated replacing Aku with any other candidate, but certain actions which Aku took suggested that he was indeed working at cross purposes with Tarka. One of this was when he travelled to Kaduna for a medical check-up after he had won the gubernatorial ticket. He was said to have written a letter and sent through Uji, asking that both the State Chairman of the NPN in the state, Chief J.C. Obande, the State Secretary, Suemo Chia and one other state official of the party, whom he was alleged to have considered not comfortable to work with, be removed from office. Uji could not deny the origin of the letter.

This angered Tarka and his loyalists and they rallied round in no time. At the instance of Suemo Chia, the State Secretary of the party, an emergency meeting of party leaders was convened at Angulu Bar in Makurdi to move for Aku's removal as the gubernatorial candidate of the NPN for the elections. Tarka was also in attendance. Hon. Ugbah Uyeh, also a die-hard Tarka loyalist but with a soft spot for Aku, however, saved Aku. He advised Aku to tender an apology before the party leaders and also withdraw the vexatious letter. He did, and that momentarily saved him.

Even at that, it seemed Aku was still bent on carving a leadership identity for himself, a clear identity from the Tarka dynasty. The UMBC elements' suspicion of him still came strong when they accused him of being behind the removal of certain persons who were known Tarka faithful from their positions as party executives at the local levels. For instance, it was believed that Aku influenced the removal of Gbangban Kor as the party chairman in Kwande local government. In Konshisha local government, Awuhe Ikyongo, who decamped from the NPP to NPN at the instance of Aku replaced a Tarka loyalist as the chairman of the party. In Katsina Ala, Chief Unongo Tor Ngibo, also an Aku apologist, took over the leadership of the party from a UMBC faithful.

Uji told the author that what actually informed the accusations against Aku was that when Tarka came back to Benue, he tinkered with most of the nominations that were conducted in the Tiv speaking area. A whole lot of the educated candidates were replaced

with those who were alleged not to be well educated. In Shangev-Tiev, for instance, late Dr. Orban Nyiakura who was the nominated candidate for the House of Representatives was replaced by one Iusu. B.D Iyortyom was replaced by Hon. Abugh Ashwe. In Kwande West, Tarka replaced Prince Yila Kuhwa with Kundu Swem. In Konshisha, John Awen, an agricultural officer, won the nomination but Tarka removed him and in his place, brought in Isaac Shaahu. It was only Ugbah Uyeh, from Vandeikya federal constituency who won his election without any interference.

With these replacements, many people, particularly the candidates who lost their positions and their supporters, were not happy. The UMBC group in the NPN sought to blackmail Aku before Tarka. They alleged that it was Aku who was instigating the people to protest against those changes.

The reaction of those whose nominations were withdrawn by Tarka contributed to the suspicion that Aku was behind the discordant tunes from some of the party loyalists. Unfortunately for Aku, the displaced candidates now began to rally round him and were assisting with his governorship campaigns. The picture created from their actions was that they were 'Aku's Boys' and therefore he was the one trying to sabotage the entire party. But despite all this, Tarka remained calm, realizing that it was those that didn't want Aku as governor that were trying to undo him.

To erase any erroneous feelings from his political leader, Aku had to go and apologize to Tarka. He literally knelt down at the Presidential Hotel in Enugu where they lodged. He told Tarka that he would never disobey him. He said he recognized Tarka as his boss and so was not contemplating any dissent.

He followed this up in a personal letter he wrote to Tarka dated April 30, 1979, where he profusely denied any involvement in the protests. He wrote;

> Dear Dr. J.S. Tarka,
>
> Doubt that the world is round
> Doubt that the sun sets in the West
> Doubt that the sun rises in the East
> But never doubt the Loyalty of Aper Aku.
>
> I am not particularly good at reporting incidents, back biting and causing confusion. I have facts and figures for

all actions I take. Anything that I do, I put your overall interest first.

I know that I joined politics because I was inspired by you. Your basic achievements in politics cannot be forgotten by any Tiv man even those that do not like you. I like you because of your endeavours and achievements, not because you are handsome. These your achievements cut through generations. You have the ability to adjust with time and generations. You are able to sustain yourself and you are widely loved by the people.

Some of the people who worked with you have been working hard like you and are still loved by their people. Some have failed badly. I have no hand in their successes and failures. Mr. Uyeh for instance has demonstrated clearly the support he enjoys in his area. Why am I not able to stop him if I am the one influencing people as Old vs New?

You can see sir that the failure of people like Mr. (Kundu) Swem and co is from their own actions.

I wish you knew this and allowed these people to find their feet amongst their own people, as Mr. Uyeh has done. Because they have failed, they want to strain the relationship between you and me using a hypothesis that has no single truth in it. For all that are young in the party, their loyalty is to YOU. For most of the Old, we do not feel this conflict.

Why should I be made the victim of disgrace where I am striving to uphold your good name?

Why don't you take into confidence and get the truth of what happened particularly in Kwande?

Who am I to confront you when I know that what I am doing is not to your overall interest?

My plea is that a little more TRUST in me and you will see the smooth results. I believe in resolving problems amicably, but NOT where the truth is deliberately hidden from you for any reason.

I feel you have treated me very well in all cases except these matters relating to Kor, Mr. Swem and Shaahu. You have not been open enough to me on these cases. I know your basic concern, but this should not be treated in

isolation.

I hope proper consultations will be made with the Kwande people at no distant future to resolve the problems in such a way that most, if not all, will be happy.
Yours ever,

APER AKU

If Aku thought the letter did any magic in his favour, he was dead wrong. Insiders claim that the letter did not convince Tarka that Aku had truly changed. Rather, they said the late political godfather was more suspicious of Aku. They said, by this time, he had made up his mind on what to do with his political godson.

And so when the party began its campaigns for the elections proper, Tarka renewed his resolve to replace Aku. At a rally at Adikpo, Tarka, speaking more rhetorically on the issue, he was said to have asked the people of the old Kwande local government where Aku hailed from, what he should do to someone proving stubborn. And whether or not they would accept someone new for an errand he had wanted to send one of their sons. The crowd at the rally, ignorant of what the political godfather meant all chorused with one voice that such a person should be replaced. Tarka did not expatiate on this but the message was already sent.

Hon. Uyeh understood what Tarka meant when he spoke at the rally. On their way back from the rally, Uyeh decided to join Aku in his car on their way back to Gboko. He advised Aku not to delay in seeking rapprochement with the political leader. Uyeh asked Aku if he understood the import of what the senator said at the rally. Aku replied in the negative. Uyeh told the author;

I told Aku that if he didn't know, his ticket was being taken away from him and given to another person. I advised him to meet Tarka first the following day and apologise before mischief makers would take a hold on the plan Tarka was about to execute.

Aku did, and as was the tradition with Tarka, he pardoned Aku but warned him to retrace his actions which were undermining his (Tarka's) authority in the party. From the political schemings that followed thereafter, it was obvious Aku too was not ready to give up on his plans to be his own man. But of course, the UMBC elements

in the NPN too did not relent. But the real threat to Aku's ambition to be Benue's first democratically elected governor was at Enugu where the party had gone for its presidential campaigns.

By this time, Tarka was said to be 'fed up' with Aku's 'arrogance' and was determined to remove him and replace him with late Chief James Adzakpe, who was then the Resident Electoral Commissioner in the old Rivers State in the defunct Federal Electoral Commission, FEDECO. Late Captain Akura Abagu, who was said to be nursing some grudges against Aku, jumped at the development when he was sent by Tarka to Port Harcourt to meet with Adzakpe and ask him to resign from his position so he could become the flag bearer of the NPN for the governorship seat.

Capt Abagu was on the way to meet with Adzakpe when pressure began to mount on Tarka to change his mind on the action he was about to take. Again, certain factors worked in favour of Aku. Abagu could not trace Adzakpe's residence on time before President Shagari and others pressurized Tarka not to rock the boat of the party at its infant stage. And before Adzakpe could get to hear the message, Tarka again sent another of his political associates to ask him to discountenance the earlier message. But insiders say it was the death of Shagari's son in an auto crash that saved Aku from that early political eclipse. They said the mood at the hotel changed and nobody was happy since Tarka too was mourning the demise of the young lad.

And since the determinant factor in the politics of the state at that time was Tarka, he had the tendency of relying much on the people with whom he started politics. These were the active members of the UMBC that followed him into the NPN. This group had encircled themselves around Tarka and they did not see Aku as one of them. In fact, it took the seeming support from the more radical elements of Tiv people, the younger generation to insist that it was Aku they wanted as governor that contributed in influencing Tarka's decision not to replace Aku with Adzakpe or any other person. Left to the conservatives around him, Aku could not have made it. He was aware of this.

Understandably, some of the apprehensions Aku had about that group was borne out of the political reality at that time. Then, there was another group who traditionally wanted to oppose Tarka. That group was led by Unongo and for Aku to be picked as governor, the group was certain to be antagonistic and they were. That was what

made Aku edgy at times.

Incidentally, this conservative group eased out about eight months into the government with the death of Tarka. The Unongo group tried to wax stronger. Although he was of a different party, Unongo worked himself out to become a minister in an NPN administration when he participated in the negotiation between NPN and the NPP short-lived political accord. The conservative wing in the NPN, with UMBC background, contributed to the problems Aku had for his re-election in 1983.

Tarka and Aku maintained a no-love lost relationship even after the 1979 general elections. It was so bad that Tarka refused to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Aku on October 1, 1979. Those close to Tarka claimed he had vowed not to come to Benue State until when it would have been time for the next elections. Suemo Chia confirmed this, saying "we were to wait till when it will be time to get Aku out of the Government House." But destiny changed all of this, as Tarka died less than a year after he took the oath as a Senator of the Federal Republic on March 30, 1980 in a London hospital.

Chapter

4

Defining the Roadmap

Aper Aku defeated Paul Belabo of the NPP, Chia Surma of the UPN and others to become the first democratically elected governor in 1979. Giving his disposition to governance, he was set to reinvent the fortunes of the state to greater economic potentials in no time. He was focused on what he had set out to achieve.

That is why much of what has come to be known as the development years of Benue State under Aku was couched in his determination to lay the foundation for the rapid industrial development of the state. This policy was anchored on the drive encapsulated in the Fourth National Development Plan that ran between 1981 through 1985.

The history of real Development Planning in Nigeria, and in fact, Benue State was first drawn up to cover the period 1962 - 1968. It was during the course of this plan that the unfortunate incidents of the 1966 coup and counter coup occurred, which later culminated in a military takeover of the government in the country. This National Development Plan was later extended by two years to end in 1970. From that time, there were two other successive plans for the country. These were for the periods from 1970 - 1974 and 1975 - 1980 respectively.

It was during the 1975-1980 Development Plan period that Benue State was created out of the old Benue-Plateau and Kwara States

in 1976. What was put together then to form a Benue State development plan was expected to run from 1975 – 1980. In fact, extractions of programmes from the plans of these two former states which the planners recognized were relevant to the newly created Benue State. Aku felt, and rightly too, that the last plan could not therefore be regarded as a real Benue State plan.

Aku then envisaged that the 1981 - 85, which he presided over, should indeed be the first plan for the state. It was a happy coincidence that the first development plan of the state was prepared under the authority of his government. This coincidence was therefore regarded as both a challenge as well as a blessing. It was a challenge in the sense that it put the Aku administration to test, as to how well it would fulfil the aspirations and satisfy the yearnings of the people of the young state that was so backward in development. It was a blessing because it provided the Aku government with a unique opportunity for this popularly elected administration to be of direct service to those who had placed their implicit confidence in his government.

On November 14, 1979, barely two months in office, Aku addressed members of the Benue State House of Assembly for the first time after reviewing the financial position of the state. He painted a grim picture of the financial status of the state and accused the administration of Group Captain Bayo Lawal, the immediate past military administrator, of financial recklessness. He told the lawmakers that the state was the poorest in the country. Inspite of this handicap, he assured them that his government was determined to implement policies, as promised by his party, the National Party of Nigeria.

Some of these policies Aku touched on were education and agriculture. On agriculture, the NPN had an ambitious food security agenda through the Green Revolution programme. Aku's administration ensured that Teachers' Training Schools in the state were expanded and more teachers recruited. To solve the scarcity of relevant text books for students, the government established the Benue Educational Supply Company, BESCO which supplied books to schools at subsidized rates. Aku's government also took over the financial administration of private and community schools.

To further overhaul the educational sector, the government dissolved what was then known as the Benue Institute for Higher Education (BIHE). It was on that day that the governor hinted on

his government's desire to establish a university of technology in the state. This was made possible with the assistance of the Federal Government. And it did not take long before the processes for the take-off of the institution commenced.

Right from day one, the governor had the vision of how he intended to turn the fortunes of the state around. He began by designing the template to bring government closer to the people. He had announced to the legislators that new local government areas would be created in the state. In short, Konshisha local government, which was eventually carved out from Vandeikya local government, was to be the first.

In the health sector, Governor Aku expressed concern over the poor state of health facilities in the state. The past administration had established a medical centre, which it claimed it had built at the cost of ₦44 million. But the governor was not impressed. He expressed dissatisfaction with the facility, but because government's finances were lean, he announced government's resolve to re-negotiate the contract. This was aimed at extending hospitals to seven other local government areas. And the government achieved in that direction before the military struck in 1983.

The outgone military government left debts for the Aku administration as well. A whopping sum of ₦100 million was inherited as liabilities. For a start, the new democratic administration in the state set aside the sum of ₦10 million from the ₦67 million supplementary statutory allocation to the state to reduce unpaid bills for jobs alleged to have been executed that were piled in the sub-treasuries across the state. But Aku insisted that no job was done to warrant such huge liability.

And he would not stop at that. He accused the past leaders of the state of neglecting the core needs of the state. The past administration was also accused of diverting state funds. Aku told the lawmakers that the military administration in the state exhibited gross lack for the ground norms of project planning. This situation, he told the state legislators, led to over contracting even when it was obvious that the state was in a dire strait and in financial depression.

The Governor's speech to the legislators reads in part:

MR. SPEAKER SIR,
HONOURABLE MEMBERS:
It has been my long standing desire to come and address you in this house much earlier. Various factors beyond my control, however, have prevented this. It is gratifying, however, to note that these delays have enabled you to settle down, elect your officials as well as set up all the appropriate committees. It has also enabled me to start finding my feet in a situation where handing-over was rather clumsy.
It has not been easy at all trying to find my feet and in this respect I must express my sincere gratitude for your own goodwill and co-operation especially as you did not delay the approval of the list of Commissioners that I sent to you. For that, I must once again say thank you.
I also wish to comment on matters affecting your general welfare; especially regarding accommodation. My administration does realize that to spend a minimum of 181 days of the year in Makurdi entails full time business in the State House of Assembly and the provision of one-bedroom accommodation is insufficient. We have, therefore, decided that two-bedroom accommodation will be made available to you from the present Housing Scheme at High Level; of which the master bedroom will be air-conditioned. I am therefore going to speed up work on the houses so that they would be ready for occupation at the earliest possible time. Mobility is the other problem. I will be meeting with my counterparts from other states to try and establish some form of uniformity. It is my opinion that car loans should be made available to all Honourable Members.
As you are all aware, the civil service was sick when we arrived and is still sick. Hence, the tribunals and panels that were set up by the former administration. That administration seemed to interfere with the funding at source and with the results. Consequently, the aim for which these panels were set was defeated, bringing more frustration within the service. With such a fragile ethnic society, dented with corruption, Mr. Speaker, you will

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probably appreciate my problem of trying to find my feet swiftly and why I have not been able to come down to address you earlier.

As we gradually get the situation under control, it is my privilege to inform you that we have inherited liabilities amounting to well over one hundred million naira (₦100, 000,000). Diversion of funds, lack of project planning, among other factors, led to over contracting when we knew that there was financial depression. Consequently, during the three and a half years of the existence of this state, Benue State is the most depressed state economically.

OUR PROGRAMME

It is with this background that we are set to execute our National Party of Nigeria (NPN) programme as contained in the manifesto. Our re-organization of the ministries is tailored to suit the implementation and three new ministries have been created. These are:

(a) Ministry of Rural Development and Co-operatives
(b) Ministry of Housing and Environment
(c) Ministry of Economic Planning.

All our development programmes are carefully being scrutinized by the Ministry of Economic Planning to enable us be precise for whatever we wish to implement.

(A) FOOD PRODUCTION AND AGRO-ALLIED INDUSTRIES

My administration is aware of the tremendous agricultural potentialities of this state. Although we are aware that all the parts of this state are productive, we are set to commission full feasibility study to cover the whole state, have it documented in order to attract investment from various quarters. It is our intention soon to earmark a minimum of one thousand (1,000) hectares of land to be cleared in all the state constituencies, except where there is no land available. The farms established will be managed by the Farmers Co-operative societies or unions. The formation of such unions has already been initiated. The Ministries of Agriculture and Rural

Development and Co-operatives will co-operate and co-ordinate the programme. The programme will introduce our farmers to large scale mechanization. All the inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and tractors will be provided by the government, while members of the co-operative unions on each cleared land would provide manual labour. From the proceeds, the Government imputs will be subtracted and the rest would be shared amongst members of the co-operative farmers according to their labour inputs. Crops that form raw materials for agro-allied industries will be encouraged, such as soya beans, groundnuts, beniseeds, cassava, yams, maize and oil palm. Feasibility study is already on the way with reference to soya beans and cassava for oil and starch processing respectively.

(B) HOUSING PROGRAMME

My administration intends to provide an average of 50-100 housing units in all the thirteen local government area headquarters. These can be occupied by both private and public sectors with the aim of the occupier gradually paying off the cost of the house and getting the ownership. Low cost scheme will be preferred to enable people in the lower income group to own houses. The establishment of the cement factory in Gboko and Burnt Bricks industry in Otukpo is particularly significant in the implementation of this programme. May be I should add that the cement factory may probably start producing before April 1980.

(C) RURAL DEVELOPMENT

In this field, we intend to extend facilities to rural areas from many directions in form of infrastructure to open the rural areas to new mode of life. There is already a plan to supply water and electricity to all local government area headquarters as well as some other major villages. Beyond these, we intend to build access roads to link up the farming centers already referred to elsewhere with major roads so that food produced in such areas could be easily evacuated. All abandoned water projects for the rural areas will be re-activated and more will be started.

(D) QUALITATIVE EDUCATION

My administration will involve all local communities in the rehabilitation of all the primary school buildings. Not only will we expand our program for teacher training, we shall also recruit more qualified teachers to teach there so that more Grade Two teachers will be produced for the Universal Primary Education. My Administration is considering the possibility of establishing a book depot in order to supply books cheaply to all the schools.

With the rapid expansion of post-primary education, the quality has declined sharply. Government now intends to take over the financial administration of all the private owned and community owned institutions. A bill will soon be tabled before you, Mr. Speaker sir, spelling out how we intend to achieve this end. It will deal with complete re-organization of the present State Schools Board.

There will also come a bill before you soon seeking the dissolution of the Benue Institute of Higher Education (BIHE). This will cut down the meaningless administration costs and allow more efficient organization of its present components.

We are committed to opening a University of Technology with the blessing of the federal Government. It is my sincere hope that your arm of the Government will give us all the necessary support in the fight against illiteracy in the state." (*The Nigerian Voice*).

In December 1979, barely three months in office, Governor Aku directed the Ministry of Economic Planning which sent out circulars to all arms of government requesting them to identify projects and return them to the State Ministry for evaluation. Such projects were to be based on a set of guidelines and plan objectives which had been circulated previously to all such agencies. Local governments too were not left out of this, for it was felt that if the plan was to have maximum impact on the people of the state, it was important that consideration be given to the people at the grassroots. It was, therefore, important that the local governments, which formed the third tier of government, be given an opportunity to indicate their preferences in the choice of projects and programmes during this plan period. Unfortunately, the local governments, as were

constituted then, lacked experience and the expertise to formulate plans on their own.

Accordingly, senior officials of the Ministry of Planning held workshops with all the local governments in January 1980, during which they were told the rationale, objectives and the mechanics of the plan, and the roles they were expected to play up to the stage of implementation.

The private sector as partners in the development of the state too was taken along in the design of these policy guidelines. For this reason, the Commissioner for Economic Planning held meetings with leading organizations in the state, including the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, the Managers of the Commercial Banks in the state and the news media. Suggestions were received and the government sought their co-operation in the identification and implementation of the programmes. The governor recognized that, for the plan to be fully implemented in a smooth manner, consultations should be at all levels and indeed intensified.

It was obvious that the Benue State plan was a part of the overall national plan which consisted of the plans of all the nineteen states as it was then including the Federal Capital Territory. All these different plans were merged together to eliminate duplication, particularly of Federal and State projects. For example, if it was discovered that Federal Government had planned to locate a particular project in a state that was also planning a similar project, such a state was advised to allow the Federal projects prevail and to put the funds earmarked by the state for that project to another use. This procedure was adopted throughout the nation, and its sole purpose was to achieve a rational procedure for launching the plan.

It was to get the legislature to play a key role in the plan that the governor presented to the members of the state House of Assembly the framework of the plan and asked them to examine the direction of government as contained in the First Benue State Development Plan. The idea behind this was to enable the lawmakers understand the basis for the plan, and to help them gain the support of all the people for the success of these programmes. The procedure was that, after the State Government would have received documents containing detailed federal projects, the state would be in a position to determine the exact projects to include in the plan as well as their locations.

As an elected government, Aku believed that his government owed its allegiance first and foremost to the electorate. The overriding objective of this development effort, therefore, was to bring about an improvement in the living conditions of the people of the state who had suffered from gross neglect by successive administrations. Aku was optimistic that, with the implementation of the development plan, the people of the state will experience real increase in their income which will include a balanced development that had the focus of better development of different sectors of the economy and the various areas of the state.

It was also expected that there would be an increased participation by the people of the state in the ownership and management of productive enterprises; with a reduction of the dependence of the economy on narrow range of activities; greater self-reliance, that is, increased dependence on locally available resources in seeking to achieve the various objectives of the society as well as reduction in the levels of unemployment and of underemployment in the state. The plan also aimed at increasing productivity, reducing rural to urban migration; and increase in the supply of skilled manpower.

In the context of the 1981-1985 development plans, agriculture enjoyed priority in allocation of resources. The Aku administration believed that this was necessary if the state was serious in pursuing its programme in agricultural self sufficiency and be able to feed the large and rapidly growing population of the state and the country and reduce reliance on imported food items. A rapid growth in agricultural production was therefore an essential component of the strategy of self-reliance which was a major objective of the plan.

Emphasis was placed on simple functional designs with respect to standard amenities such as schools, hospitals, residential and office buildings because no grandiose projects were included in the plan. The Aku administration was conscious enough to encourage the use of domestic resources both human and material. In addition, while adequate attention was paid to the development of new projects and programmes, the government focused itself on addressing their efforts also to the consolidation and maintenance of already existing facilities so as to prevent the gains from being lost through rapid deterioration of productive assets.

For the four years that the development plan was to run through, the state government proposed to invest a total of about one billion,

two hundred million or ₦1.2 billion during the plan period. Out of this figure, all the local governments in the state were expected to invest about ₦250 million, leaving the state government with ₦950 million. The National Planning Office set plan ceilings with the limit of ₦1.2 billion for each state including Benue State after taking many variables into consideration. Benue State's projection ceiling was however comparable only with states with similar status in the federation. For instance, Kwara and Plateau States had a ceiling of ₦1.1 billion each, and Gongola ₦1.3 billion. The highest was the old Bendel State with a ceiling of ₦2.2 billion and the smallest being Niger and Ogun States with a ceiling of ₦1 billion each.

And in tandem with the policy thrust of the NPN-led federal government, which made agriculture its cardinal objective through the Green Revolution programme, Aku's government too did not deviate from this. It was also aimed at making the state a truly agricultural hub of the nation. In order to achieve the objectives of agricultural development, the Aku administration concentrated its efforts on large scale land clearing and development. This policy was to create an enabling environment for development both by farmer's co-operatives as well as by large commercial farmers.

Aku pursued vigorously, the integrated rural development programmes such as the Ayangba Agricultural Programme. The success of that programme encouraged the administration to extend it to other zones of the state. Other major programmes were the National Accelerated Food Production Programme, which was aimed at creating employment opportunities for the teeming population to link agriculture with rural development and agro-based industries.

Mechanized farming was introduced to replace the traditional methods of farming to promote increased food production; to intensify production of raw materials to meet the needs of the growing industrial sector; to promote increased production and processing of export crops.

A cattle breeding and fattening ranch was also established at Ikyogen where herds were imported from Texas. Apart from the beef programme, which the cattle were to be used for, the ranch was designed to serve as a dairy scheme where 10,000 litres of fresh milk were to be produced per day.

In his pursuit to industrialize the state, which is the hallmark in the development of any economy, feasibility studies of some

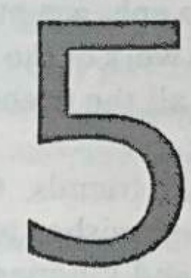
industries were undertaken early in the life of his administration and implementation of some of the viable ones started. It was from this template of development that projects like the Makurdi International Hotel, which was inherited from the Bayo Lawal government, was taken up seriously and executed to the point at which it has remained ever since. There was also the Lobi Bank established to provide financial aid and network of commercial services required in an expanding economy. Makurdi International Market and other key industrial efforts that were put in place to set the state on the pedestal of development were also built.

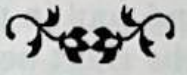
The main objective for all these was to generate sufficient employment to absorb the increasing population of school leavers in the state. The success of these industries was expected to provide both forward and backward linkages to generate sufficient demand for local resources as inputs, thereby expanding for the agricultural base of the state. The production of scarce commodities was given top priority in the selection of these industries.

In his presentation to the state lawmakers on the policy thrust in this direction, Aku told the assembly members that, as a deliberate policy and in order to generate necessary financial and manpower resources for the implementation of the industrial development programmes, his government was willing to go into partnership with any serious minded investors, local or foreign to provide management and effect transfer of technology.

This, of course, formed the basis for the partnership in the establishment of the now defunct Lobi bank, Taraku Mills, Makurdi International Hotels and a host of other companies that his administration initiated.

Chapter





Good Night Tarka

Before he passed away on Sunday March 30th, 1980, Tarka wrote a couple of letters to his political friends and associates and also his followers in Tivland. One of such letters was sent to his colleagues in the Senate. It was dated March 17th, 1980, barely two weeks before his death. The contents of the letter were emotion-laden. He wrote:

> My Dear brother Senators,
> How I wish I could say, my dear brother and sister Senators; all the same, we may say this in the next session in keeping with our screening and passage of female ministers in the president's cold comfort.
>
> Principally, this letter is to convey my gratitude for your moral support through the various delegations you have sent out here to visit me. These gestures have enhanced my rapid recovery. For this and for individual deeds of kindness which have sparked other public support thereby accelerating my recovery, I am most grateful.
>
> This makes me feel like a Senator who cuts across the various barriers across the table. I am deeply touched and I have no words to convey my undying gratitude to all of you and the various staff of the National Assembly.

When I am eventually discharged from my occasional but effective treatment, I will take a holiday in an unknown place to have full rest to enhance my energy for my little contribution to the good work of the Senate and be further tamed in order to have all the friends and no foes in our distinguished gathering.

Once again, Sirs, Dear friends, Colleagues, I wish to express my heartfelt good wishes to you and the utmost gratitude for your love and kindness.

I remain your body and soul in the comradiere which we all have enjoyed in the short period of our senatorial service to the nation.

Your humble brother and friend,

Dr. Chief J.S. Tarka

Another letter, as seen below, was addressed to the Tiv people. It was more prophetic, telling the story of his death as Paul the Apostle would write to fellow believers saying: 'I have finished the race.' It was in Tiv language. He wrote:

Hen ityô yam Tiv cii (Uter, Ungôôv, Ahur a Ior man Mbayev)

Tom u yange Aondo nam ian er m er yo m er u kure hegen. Nahan ka u me yem me undu ne jene. Nahan ka kwagh orun wam u maseityo hen aven jene. Hanmaor u nan lu Or Tiv di tso yô nan kor kwagh ne nan saa a min. Yange m hii tom wam hii hii la je awashima wam lu u I pav tar sha aciuxhanmaor yô nana tema I kpe nan iyol yô. Mhii kwagh ne ken pati u UMBC. Ken shie ne Tiv cii dondum. Tso er lu pati u UMBC ne va lu gomoti ga yo, Tiv cii lu ior mba hendan a gomoti. Ka nahan man Tiv cii zua a kwar ken gomoti u shie la ga ye.

Ica gba ga man shoja va ngohol gomoti. Ka ken shie la I tsuam mlu minista u nengen sha akaa a hendan a ken Nigeria cii. Hen shien la kpaa mlu a mhen u I pav tar la her tsô, man lu shie ne kpaa m na Gowon mhen u pav tar avegher pue kar a har ye. Mba paven tar ne yo, ior ka fan ve er kwagh u yange m ôron mer I pav tar la yange lu

kwagh u dedoo la. Er I nenge mhen wam ne doo yum yô, I seer paven tar hingir avegher pue kar ataan kar anyiin. Ken gbaa u paven tar la kpaa ka pe m er tom wam m za kure vough la. Hegen er I pav tar yô, mze hemen nyôr ken Nigeria war tseren. Hanmaor tema doo nan kera ka Tiv tseegh ga, man awashima wam kure vough er yange m soo la.

Pati shi za ve yo, mhen gbaangh yô sha mlu u I pav tar yo kure vough er yange m soo la ve nahan mase shin u me nongo Tiv cii ve de lun ior mba hendan a gomoti sha kwa har ga ye. Lu hen shie ne mkaa aa ityo yam Tiv mer ve cii ve lu ken pati u NPN u mo kpaa yange m lu mom ken mba yange ve dugh un la ye, sha ciu m fa di yô ka pati la una va lu gomoti u Nigeria ye. Heen kpaa awashima wam kure vough sha a ciu pati u NPN maa gomoti man ityo yam Tiv kpaa ve lu ken gomoti u ainge ne nahan.

Hegen akaa ahar a yange lu zan mo iyor la cii a kure vough; I pav tar er yange m soo la shi m nyor a Tiv cii ken gomoti u Nigeria hegen. Hegen m sugh Aondo kpishi er a nam ian mkur tom wam vough er yange m soo la nahan. Ka u me yem me undu ne jene. Ter Aondo yilam. Ku wam kera vihim kpee ga cii sha aciu m kure mba awashima av cii. Mngu wan ne cii kwagh wan u mase ityo mer, hanmaor Tiv di tsô yôn an kor NPN ave ahar sha aciu ka NPN adugh a Tiv ken ican kera ye. Ma yange de lumun nen asondo a mbayev wue wue la ve meen ne ve za keren inyaregh a min ga cii. M ngu yemen undun ne vea Aper Aku kua mba genev mba ve lu a shima I teen Tiv ga yo. Vea hemen ne vough zan zan iyange I ter Aondo a mase nan ne ian u za kohol mo yo. Ter ahemen ne lu nen zwa mom. Lu nen dedoo. Saa ne va.
Ka mo

Dr. Chief J.S. Tarka

Tarka's last letter to the Tiv people is translated into English below:

To my fellow Tiv people. (Fathers, Mothers, Friends and Brothers) I am happy to report to you that I have

successfully completed the work that God gave me the opportunity to do. And so this is my last word to you. Every Tiv man should take these words seriously and keep them.

My first task in my political career was to ensure the creation of states so that every part of this country would benefit. That was under the umbrella of the defunct UMBC. Tiv people followed me in this. Unfortunately, UMBC did not form the central government and therefore Tiv people were in the opposition. That is why the Tiv people did not get any fair deal in that dispensation.

That civilian government did not last as the military took over government. I was then appointed a minister in that administration in charge of transportation. I still pursued my agenda of state creation in that regime relentlessly and was one of those that convinced Gen. Yakubu Gowon to create twelve states out of the regions. Thereafter, seven more states were created making it 19. That was how far my commitment to our people on states creation could go. I am happy that most sections in Nigeria are satisfied with the states creation. And I am too.

When party politics returned in 1979, my concern was that Tiv people should not continue to be in the opposition as it was the case in the First Republic. That was the reason I convinced you all to join me in the NPN where I was one of the founding fathers. I knew the NPN would form the central government. Here too my desire was met because NPN formed the government at the centre and the Tiv people were not left out. Now the two important issues that bothered me in my political career were settled. I am grateful to God for the opportunity He has given me to complete my assignment here. I have finished my task, so this is where I leave you all. God has called me. I am not pained that I am going to die because my heart desires have been met. I am advising you all now for the last time. Let every Tiv man hold onto the NPN with their two hands because it's the NPN that has delivered the Tiv people out of slavery.

Do not allow a few of Tiv sons who, because of money, have joined other political parties to gain financial benefits.

Let them not use you to get money for themselves.
I am going but leaving you with Aper Aku and others who would not sell the Tiv people. They will all lead you until the day God will also call you to meet me. Please remain united with one voice.

Till you'll come
Dr. Chief J.S. Tarka

In the early hours of Monday March 31st, 1980, Aper Aku received an unusual telephone call from the former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces, Alhaji Shehu Shagari. As the governor of Benue State, Aku had received similar calls at such times from the President in the past but this particular one was different. It was to break sad news. It carried in its trail tears that could affect a people's political fortunes.

Senator Joseph Sarwuan Tarka, the once revered leader of the Tiv and Middle Belt politics who was battling with a terminal illness had lost the fight. He had died in a London hospital the previous day, March 30th, 1980. This sad news was received with rude shock throughout the country and was much dreaded in Benue State.

Five days before Tarka died, Aku was beside him on his sick bed in South London. He wore an unusually morose countenance as he ambled his way towards the hospital bed of Senator Tarka. As he got nearer and saw Tarka huddled up in bed, his heart missed a beat. The idol of the people was engaged in an excruciating battle with death and from all indications he was losing.

While there, the late Senator and Aku talked extensively on the need for unity in the National Party of Nigeria and particularly Benue State. Tarka had warned that unless the forces of confusion and disunity in the party were kept at the barest minimum, it may not augur well for the party. He then charged Aku with the responsibility to ensure that the unity and success of the party in Benue State and in Nigeria in general is kept intact and that all ideals the party stood for were realized.

On 14 March, 1980, the late senator was moved to write the state secretary of the NPN in Benue, Thomas Degarr, giving him directives as to how he should pilot the affairs of the party away from the unnecessary influence of the state government. Perhaps,

Tarka and Aku put their heads together for an extensive chat, dwelling mostly on the leadership of the people and the party. Aku was not the only person who visited Tarka on his sick bed but it was obvious that his visit was of special significance and interest. Less than a week after Governor Aku's return to Lagos, Tarka lost his gruelling battle with death.

There was no physical handing over of mantles, but there was every indication that, at age 42 and being the governor of Benue, Aku had emerged as the man with the sharpest profile as the successor to Tarka as Tiv leader and beyond. At least the platform provided for by the ruling NPN and its acceptability in the state and nationally, was seen as a possibility. Although, Aku refused to be drawn into arguments over claims to the leadership of the Tiv people, there was really no questioning his entitlement to that position which he rightfully argued then that such presumptions bordered on parochialism. Aku saw himself as a potential national figure and so refused to be drawn to sectional political calculations. Aku obviously had a more sophisticated idea of leadership and his own self.

He told *New Times* magazine in an interview that:

> I have had occasion to tell some newsmen that I should be counted out of Tiv leadership though I can understand that your reference to me as the Tiv leader is your own personal observation borne out of your independent study. If one at this stage does not think of leadership of Nigeria as a whole, but of a tribal grouping, then it is unfortunate.

Aku's stance on the political leadership among the Tiv was understandable and commendable. As the Governor of Benue State then, it would have been naive for him to flaunt himself as leader of just the major tribal group, Tiv, in the state. That was coupled with the barrage of attacks that had begun to gather against him from politicians who thought the demise of Tarka would pop them up to upstage Aku. It was, therefore, correct for him to be father of all including all the political parties in the state.

It was still discernible that while Aku may not have claimed that position openly, the governor was privately nursing the idea deep down in his thoughts. Apart from that, it was obvious that by some stroke of an act of fate, the baton was handed over to him by the late Tarka and was regarded as such by many people. In fact, at his

Tarka's endorsement of Degarr's administrative sagacity may have emboldened him to challenge the authority of Governor Aku in the run up to the 1983 elections.

Tarka was an apostle of political apprenticeship as was practised by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. That was one of the reasons most political elites in Tivland felt ostracized with his brand of politics and preferred to tow the line of Paul Unongo who had so much charm and charisma. He had confessed in his last letter to Degarr that some of his antagonists who were wishing that he slide into deep darkness were just out to satisfy their unworthy and ostentatious and "inordinate ambitions for lack of desire to serve apprenticeship the way some of us had done with the Ziks and Awolowos."

Tarka had assured Degarr that he would assist him "morally and materially" when he returns from his medical trip and urged him to do his best "to keep the party together on the original strategy" by ensuring that the local chapters continue working in the same arrangements they were when he inherited it. Specifically, Tarka told Degarr:

> Not to allow government machinery to get mixed up with the party machinery. Otherwise, the government will become a party government run from the Government House through the Political Adviser, who himself has been a strong and worthy organising secretary in the past and will now be power hungry to run the field work of the party and his official job as Political Adviser to the Governor. Ours should be the government party in Benue State and not the party of government as some have attempted to make it.

But the late Senator was not unmindful of the risks in the assignment he gave Degarr. In so much as he cherished that the former State Secretary of the NPN steers the party clear from executive interferences, he cautioned him not to disregard the position of the state governor but to co-operate with Aku "so as not to create a division in the state." He further told him to ensure that "harmony should be your watchword and you must therefore tread with caution in order not to upset the apple cart."

Besides Degarr, Tarka also discussed the politics of Benue State with Aku, Isaac Shaahu and late Tyoor Mgbami Takema on what could be done to contain the implosion that was rearing its head as some persons began to plot ahead of the 1983 general elections.

Tarka and Aku put their heads together for an extensive chat, dwelling mostly on the leadership of the people and the party. Aku was not the only person who visited Tarka on his sick bed but it was obvious that his visit was of special significance and interest. Less than a week after Governor Aku's return to Lagos, Tarka lost his gruelling battle with death.

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graveside oration during the burial ceremony, Aku took advantage of the size and class of his audience to announce that the late Senator had personally charged him with the responsibility of keeping Benue and the NPN together.

In his signature growl voice, Aku told the huge assemblage of personalities from within and outside the state, who had come to witness the burial of the political idol of many, how Tarka's "spirit moved me five days to his death to visit him at his sick bed." He went on to tell the gathering how the late politician charged him with the responsibility to ensure that the unity and success of the party was sustained even after his death. He said he was using the opportunity to appeal to "all the Tiv people in particular, citizens of Benue, Nigerians and supporters of the NPN, to heed to the advice given by our leader."

This was largely interpreted to mean a tacit endorsement of his leadership by the late Senator, who in his lifetime was the unchallenged leader of the Tiv people and the Middle Belt. Of course, there were other politicians in the state who wanted to lay claim to the leadership of the state. There were people like Hon Isaac Shaahu and Paul Unongo among others.

Tarka himself was aware of the differences between Aku and Shaahu, hence he attempted to resolve the friction, even on his sick bed, through his trusted political associates like Ugor Iwoor, Luga Iyortyom, Mgbami Takema and Zeremo Avaan.

This much is contained in a letter he wrote to the quartet on March 28, 1980, two days before he died. He admonished them to:

> Come together and iron out your differences in such a manner that there will be no room for individual squabbles among yourselves. Make sure you help Governor Aku with the task of governing Benue State. You all elected Governor Aku to his present position, hence there is need for you to advise him on matters that will be of meaningful progress to his administration. I am convinced that the meeting I held here with Governor Aku and Minister Shaahu in the presence of Mr. Takema as a witness will be part of great importance for the progress of our party in Tiv in particular and Benue in general.

The late Senator Tarka hailed from Wannune, Mbakor district in present day Tarka local government. He was born of humble parents at Igbor, Gwer Local Government of Benue State, on 10th July, 1932.

He had his elementary education at Tiv Native Authority Primary School, Gboko, Katsina-Ala Middle School, in 1946, and Bauchi Teacher Training College in the late 1940s.

He began his public career as a teacher and taught at Gboko and Wannune Native Authority Schools. After attending the Rural Science course at Bauchi, the late Senator later taught at Katsina-Ala Middle School as Rural Science Master until 1954 when he decided to join politics. Chief Tarka contested elections to the Federal House of Representatives and won on the platform of the Middle Belt Peoples Party-Action Group Alliance which later became United Middle Belt Congress of Nigeria (U.M.B.C.) Action Group Alliance. In 1958, he was appointed Shadow Minister of Commerce and member of Public Accounts Committee.

At age 24, Tarka's political career began to soar and he was unanimously elected President of the UMBC at the Lafia convention of the party in 1956. In 1957, as a leader of his people, the late Tarka joined his other Nigerian colleagues at the London Constitutional Conference on Nigeria's Independence. His positive contributions at this conference earned him the reputation as a frontline nationalist, struggling for total emancipation of Nigerians from colonial domination. He also attended and actively participated in the Pan-African Conference at Accra, Ghana in 1959.

In the 1959 general elections in Nigeria, Tarka's UMBC party voted 90 percent for Action Group to sweep the polls in Tivland and some parts of the Middle Belt area. This was how the party formed the only known opposition in history to the dominated NPC controlled government of the Northern Region of Nigeria. This no doubt was in view of his astute leadership qualities, political fortitude and champion of the oppressed minority people of the Middle Belt area and those in other parts of Nigeria. He also joined forces with some of his contemporaries and demanded for the creation of more regions in Nigeria including that of the Middle Belt Region.

This was responded to with stiff opposition from the powerful northern oligarchy and this started a vicious political campaign of calumny against him. Following on this, he was arrested on implicit politically trumped-up charges of treasonable felony and conspiracy to overthrow the Federal Government of Nigeria. He was detained, hounded, persecuted, humiliated but later set free. In yet another case of political victimization, Tarka was arrested, impartially tried and imprisoned for six months but was again discharged and

acquitted by the higher court.

Indeed, Tarka's UMBC created a real sense of identity among the Tiv people as well as the minority tribes. The victimization of its members in the First Republic led to the Tiv riots in 1960 and 1964, during which scores of people were killed.

Tarka's travails were alleged to have been instigated by a prominent Tiv politician, who, in July 1974, through Godwin Daboh, in alliance with the then Benue-Plateau State Governor, Joseph Gomwalk, wrote open letters to Tarka who was the Federal Communications Commissioner. Daboh followed it up with an affidavit in court alleging that Tarka was corrupt. Tarka had initially resisted resigning because as he was quoted later, he warned that 'If I resign, it will set off a chain of reactions of various events, the end of which nobody could foretell.' Of course, the events that followed proved him right.

After his resignation, Tarka pointed out the dangers of what he termed as "high-tech press and judicial lynching." In an interview with the *Sunday Observer* in August of 1974, he had warned that "any commissioner, governor, chief justice, judge, magistrate, military officer or civil servant must resign the moment he is unlucky to find anyone who can be instigated to accuse him." *(Sunday Observer,* 1974).

On August 31st, 1974, barely a month later, Aku, who was believed to be acting as a protégé of Tarka, in turn accused Governor Gomwalk of corruption in an affidavit he filed at the Jos High Court. Before that, Aku had written several letters to Gomwalk and Gowon alleging corruption against the former military governor.

Tarka truly had turbulent times in his political career. In spite of all these tribulations, he remained undaunted. He was not shaken in his convictions to lead his people faithfully, honestly and with greater enthusiasm than ever before.

As a frontline politician, he possessed tremendous charisma in political mobilization and articulation. His political ambition simply transcended sectional or ethnic interests. His directional intuition made him to aspire for the leadership of Nigeria. If given the opportunity, he would have lived up to expectation. He did not just bestride Tivland with his charming personality and influence peddling, in fact, he worked hard and earned himself fame and an enviable position. In the First Republic, as an illustrious political

son of his people, he personified and led the UMBC political party of their choice. During the Military rule of 1966 — 1979, Tarka, as a political actor, contributed in no small way to the unity of Nigeria against the forces of secession.

At that funeral oration, Aku gave credit to the late political icon for taking advantage of his mass support in the country to advocate for the creation of more states as a panacea against Nigeria's disintegration. He achieved some level of success under the Gen. Yakubu Gowon administration when twelve states were created out of the regions that made up the country after independence.

Today, every Nigerian knows that the creation of more states in Nigeria is to the advantage of both the majority and the minority alike and the equality of states in Nigeria is the surest way of even development and sense of belonging. During this time, the late Senator also served this country creditably as Federal Commissioner for Transport and Communication until he was forced to resign his appointment in 1974.

At the dawn of the Second Republic, the late Chief Tarka returned to active partisan politics and made greater impact which shocked all detractors. As one of the founders of the National Party of Nigeria, his people and supporters voted about 70 percent for the party and this enabled the party to form the government effectively in Benue and at the national level.

Aku personally came in contact with the late Tarka in 1954 and more intimately in 1959 when he was a student at the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria. Aku had drawn good inspiration from the tremendous qualities, perseverance and courage possessed by the politician.

In 1964, when Aku completed his studies, late Senator Tarka invited him to join politics and contest elections but he was said to have asked his leader for more time to allow him gain more experience. In spite of this, he continued to monitor Tarka's political career, especially his stand on the liberties of the oppressed minority people in Nigeria and his strong belief in the creation of states as an instrument of true democracy, peace, unity and even development in Nigeria. These were, no doubt, some of the greatest contributions the late Tarka made in his political career in this country for which he is always remembered.

Owing to Tarka's large heartedness, even his political opponents and detractors agreed that he never did anything to liquidate them.

Of course, he may have disagreed with his opponents, but he never regarded them as enemies. He was shrewd and calm in times of political witch hunting, he remained positive and firm in his stand on major political issues. These qualities no doubt made him a great statesman.

As a mark of respect and honour to the instructions of his mentor, Aku worked hard to appeal to the conscience of all the Tiv people in particular, citizens of Benue State, Nigerians and supporters of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) to heed to the advice given by their leader and by emulating his exemplar qualities. His preoccupation was for everyone to work relentlessly for peace, unity and prosperity of this country. Some stuck to the NPN ideals with him but those who were already aggrieved started looking elsewhere for political succour.

To immortalize the name of the late Tarka, the Aku administration had completed plans to establish an Institute of Political Studies. Prof. Omo Omuruyi, an erudite political scientist from old Bendel State, was named as the Chairman of the Governing Council and was saddled with the responsibility to midwife the project. Late Tor Tiv, James Akperan Orshi, was named the Chairman of the Board of Trustees. It was billed to commence full academic activities immediately after the 1983 general elections but this would not be, as the military struck in December 1983 alleging massive rigging in the elections of that year.

On May 4, 1982, Aku, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, wrote letters to prominent individuals and corporate bodies throughout Nigeria, canvassing financial support to build the Institute. The Tarka Institute was located on the ground where he was buried in Gboko. This, the former governor noted, was to recognize Tarka's contributions to the political development of Nigeria. The Institute was to engage in research teaching, dissemination of information and to conduct studies in Nigerian politics with emphasis on positive contributions made by eminent Nigerians of the past and to also put into perspective, positions for the future. It was also designed to be an academic insitution where all Nigerians and other peoples can study Nigerian and African political thoughts, history and culture.

Four core building projects were earmarked to be built in the first phase of construction at the site of the institution. These were a library, a lecture theatre, an administrative block and a conference

centre.

Unfortunately, the ideas behind the institute have remained a mere pipe dream. Former governor of Benue State, Rev. Fr. Moses Adasu, now deceased, attempted to live the dream but the 1993 coup by Gen. Sani Abacha stalled it. Till date, the initial structures at the premises have become desolate. In fact, there has been some encroachment by some individuals on the land.

But as Aku and his supporters were still grappling to overcome the shocks over the death of their leader, his opponents were strategizing to whittle down his influence. This was targeted at the 1983 general elections. This upbeat began to push Benue to become a political hotbed. It began witnessing hot political exchanges and sometimes between close political soul mates. The state evolved into a mixed flurry of chauvinism and political chicanery. This was after about nine months of remarkable quietness.

Despite the feeling in some quarters that Aku could easily pass as Tarka's successor, two other personalities, whose names emerged in speculations to the leadership of the Tivs, were Isaac Shaahu and Paul Unongo. Shaahu's name came up for obvious reasons. He had had a long political relationship with Tarka from the UMBC days. He, therefore, felt that ordinarily, he should step into Tarka's shoes.

Shaahu, then Minister for Commerce, was reported to be in the good books of the late Tarka. He was a long time associate of the Middle Belt leader and a politician of several years standing. He sought for and lost the nomination of governorship for Benue State on the NPN platform in 1979. Sources say that Tarka even backed his nomination but that certain events compelled that his candidature be dropped in favour of Aku. It is believed that this is where the animosity between Shaahu and Aku really began.

Shaahu gave insight to this in a petition he presented to the panel set up by the national headquarters of the NPN to look into the crises that had engulfed the Benue State chapter of the party. Although Shaahu, in one breath, dismissed the general feelings that the causes of destabilization in the party in Benue State was centred around the former governor, he and Aku, who were at each other's throat for the leadership vacated by the death of Tarka, but admitted in another breath that the starting point is the "supposed leadership struggle between the two of us."

Shaahu had even accused Aku of reaping where he did not sow by laying claim to the leadership of the Tiv. He had told the NPN

panelists that he and other UMBC faithful endured "heinous injustice" in the hands of the NPC lords without the presence of the likes of Aku, whom he said were busy pursuing their educational laurels. Shaahu wrote;

> When all the inhuman acts were being perpetuated, some were busy manipulating the situation to either further their job prospects or their educational pursuits. The U.M.B.C., led by the late Chief (Dr.) Senator JS. Tarka, did not attract our educated young men. For one reason, they were too preoccupied with present day benefits than to stand up and join the fight. Secondly, many believed that we had embarked upon an impossible task which could not be achieved in their lifetime.

Shaahu's attempt to whittle down Aku's stature and promote his image did not elicit much currency as he was frustrated out of the NPN to join forces with the Unity Party of Nigeria, UPN. That, of course, could not impress the majority of the Tiv people whose affinity to anything Tarka was deep rooted. Besides, Shaahu could not show good cause as to why he should be preferred to Aku whom he was bent on maligning politically.

Surprisingly, Aku himself was not too keen on talking about the leadership question for the Tiv, since for him, "Tiv is just a tribe." As he would rather put it, "If one at this stage does not think of leadership in terms of Nigeria as a whole because of the prevailing political situation then it's bad. At least the constitution is cut in such a way that one may not have to look too far because you have only four to eight years. That is to say if you have any interest in any post at a particular time, either you missed it or either you are just considering asking for a certain post, be it a seat in the State Assembly, Federal House, governorship or whatever one can think in terms of four or eight years. This is one aspect that makes this constitution superior to the previous one."

He reasoned that it would be self defeating for him to be aiming at being just a leader of the Tivs. As a good Nigerian citizen, he was of the opinion that if he were looking forward to any form of leadership, quite naturally, he would prefer something more broad based.

Former Minister for Steel Development, Paul Unongo, was considered as a man of controversial pedigree even though he seemed to have worked the people to his side causing Aku and his

NPN some sleepless nights. Although Unongo commanded a lot of goodwill among the people, part of his inability to lay claim to the leadership position after Tarka's exit was because he was said not to be on good terms with the late Senator while he was alive. That alone was enough to destroy whatever chances he had in Tiv politics. His seeming popularity gave way when all NPP candidates who contested elections to the State and Federal legislative houses in his area, Turan in Kwande local government area, lost.

The outcome of that election may have influenced Mvendaga Jibo, then Commissioner for Education in Aku's government, to conclude that, "Unongo is on the fringe of Tiv politics." That was before Jibo disagreed with Aku and abandoned his government without recourse to his principal over allegations by S.J.I. Akure, a retired permanent secretary in the Benue State service. Akure alleged that Aku had stashed abroad, millions of naira. The allegations turned out to be false.

Jibo had said then that he saw the former governor as the obvious leader of the Tiv after Tarka. But all that changed when he accused his former boss of policy misjudgement.

Former State Secretary of the NPN, Thomas Degarr, also had two reasons why he believed Unongo would never gain acceptance as Tiv leader. The first was because of the political party he belonged to and the second was what he considered Unongo's "apishness."

But again, Degarr, a close confidant of the late Tarka, further asserted that people should stop looking at governmental appointments as denoting leadership of the Tivs even though he admitted that it nevertheless appeared to be pivotal.

While giving Aku very high marks for his level headedness, humility and acceptance, Degarr also noted that the late Senator was not appointed or elected as leader of his people. It was his behaviour, his character, sincerity and what he stood for that gave him the unquestionable hold over the people. But then he added, "If the governor wants to lead the people well, he must learn his lessons."

By this time, the governor had already got his bearings right and there seemed to be no stopping him as the successor of Tarka and more. In more ways than one, Aku differed from Tarka in style, approach and disposition.

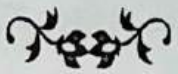
There were testimonies that the personality of Aku towered above his contemporaries angling for the leadership of the Tiv. But as John

Chiahemen, a former *Reuter's* senior journalist once observed, apart from the fact that Aku was "politically shy," he was way ahead of all of them in terms of fame, acceptability, record and influence. Aku's staying power was drawn from the way he loved mixing with the people and staying with them through thick and thin.

Sebastian Agbinda who worked closely with the former governor in the research directorate also gave reasons why the late Tarka probably settled with Aku and not Shaahu for the leadership of his people. This, he said, was because the former was in a better position by virtue of his position, power and proximity to improve the lot of the people. His former press secretary, John Mbapuun, described Aku as "the godfather of us all." And he lived up to that appellation.

Chapter

6



Altering a History of Neglect

Before the creation of Benue State, there had always been a Benue province in the pre-colonial and even post-colonial Nigeria. But the birth of modern Benue is the untold story of political doggedness and unswerving commitment to the cause of transforming a neglected estate into a green pasture.

It must be pointed out quickly that the Benue State that the NPN government, led by Aper Aku in 1979 represented, as it were, was only a mere change of name from the old Benue province to Benue State with scarcely any infrastructural development or capital outlay to write home about. There was too little to suggest that this geographical expression had indeed been transformed into a political reality. At inception, the new administration had to contend with not only initiating new programmes of development but also making up for years of past neglect.

And so, to appreciate Aku and his administration more objectively and fairly, it is worthy to note that Benue State started out, like most of the other states, essentially as only one of the twenty provinces of colonial Nigeria, and one of the Middle-Belt provinces of Northern Nigeria. Later, Benue was paired with Plateau province to form

what became Benue-Plateau State.

It is a truism that new states are created not only to ease political tension but to quicken the pace of socio-economic development. Unfortunately, the experience of Benue State in the marriage of Benue-Plateau State was a reverse case. Political tension and hostility not only escalated but also led to a deliberate policy of underdevelopment of the Benue axis of the state, a policy which was presided over by the then military Governor of Benue-Plateau State, late Police Commissioner Joseph Gomwalk.

The creation of Benue State in 1976 was, therefore, expected to provide some relief in this regard. And it did provide some relief, under two successive military administrations. But Benue State of the military era was to become famous more for frivolous and hedonistic pursuits than for any infrastructural breakthrough or other hallmarks of development. Projects were haphazardly initiated and abandoned in spite of the buoyant cash flow of the military era at that time.

In the social sector, the arrival of the Igalas from Kwara State to join the Idoma, and the Tivs in the fledgling Benue State added a separate dimension to the task of ethnic integration.

Thus on its birth in 1976, and during the few years that followed, Benue State did not represent the dream land for the impoverished and disinherited Benue people in any way that could be termed a triumphant end to their tedious odyssey from Kaduna to Makurdi.

To employ the usual cliché, it was right to assume that government had been brought closer to the people, but only in its institutional trappings. The Benue State that the NPN administration of Governor Aku took over in 1979 was a sad spectacle of a system characterized by monumental lethargy and a people still learning to live together. On the whole, the general performance all around was certainly below pass mark, and the general picture was that of a stillborn child.

History is about cause and effects. Many people have no sense of history, while some have a wrong sense of it.

People study history so that they can understand their present and plan for the future. Even the people of Benue State need to be reminded of their political history from time to time in order to appreciate the affairs and development within their state more objectively and to enable them employ the correct parameters in assessing and passing value judgment on the activities of their leaders and government.

Anybody with a true sense of history cannot but view and treat with honour, the NPN administration of Governor Aku that piloted the affairs of Benue State from 1979 to December 31, 1983. In the same manner, the former governor deserves more than just a pat on the back for the untiring efforts he laid to build Benue State better than he found it.

The Benue State that was created in 1976 was still the glorified Benue province that formed part of Benue-Plateau State, but today, more than four decades after he left the stage, Aku turned what was a mere geographical expression and nurtured it into a transformed political reality which many political leaders refer to as the modern Benue State.

But did Aku just wave a magic wand, and modern Benue was born? If not, how did he do it?

During the military regime of General Yakubu Gowon, he operated the policy of recruiting state indigenes as military rulers of their states. Sadly, this system became a double-edged sword. Whilst the most vociferous critics of the system felt that such "son of the soil" approach to leadership recruitment ran counter to military ethics and modus, as it amounted to a tacit official recognition of ethnic chauvinism. As it were, some other Nigerians saw the practice as more "realistic" and a guarantee of commitment on the part of the state governors so appointed.

Whichever argument is the more plausible, the rationale (if it could be so called) did have its positive as well as negative effects, depending, and it seems, on the character of the appointee. For instance, in the case of former Benue-Plateau State, it was certainly counter-productive, as the

government emphasized lopsided development and ethnic cleavages almost as its official policy. On the flip side, it was a different ball game in Mid-western State (now Edo and Delta States) where former Brigadier S.O. Ogbemudia made his name through what became known as "Mid-West Miracle." Ogbemudia did not only rebuild the war-battered economy of the then Mid-West in record time, but also made his home state a showpiece of development.

Expectedly, the election of Aku as governor in 1979 brought self-government to Benue State. This was the first time that a Benue indigene would preside over the affairs of the state. If only on a modest scale, the famous "Mid-West Miracle" was also re-enacted in Benue State. The difference however was that the then Mid-West of Brigadier Ogbemudia was not a 'new' state because it had acquired substantial infrastructural development. In Benue State, Governor Aku met a brand new state impoverished and empty. Whilst Ogbemudia was rebuilding an economy that used to exist, Aku's task became one of building a brand new economy, and with the neglect and waste of the past, he was building from sorrow. Slowly but steadily, Aku galvanized his energy in just four years, in laying the foundations of transforming a simple agricultural economy into an industrial economy at the only speed that was possible with the resources at his disposal. *(The Birth of a New Benue: An overview of Governor Aku's first term: 1979-1983).*

That was the story of Benue as at October 1979. The economy of Benue State was pathetically depressed. Stagnation was apparent. Virtually all the development and social service projects embarked upon by the then military administration were grounded, owing largely to lack of funds but primarily because there was a shortage of both goodwill and determination to prosecute those projects either to a successful completion or even to an appreciable level.

The state owed contractors over one hundred and seventeen million naira. The picture of a young state like Benue State could hardly be gloomier. This was the picture when Aku stepped in. The state was, therefore, handicapped both in terms of morale and finance. But somehow, it provided the new administration with both

a challenge and iron-willed determination to succeed.

Aku himself noted this in his inaugural broadcast. He said the creation of Benue State "raised the aspirations of our people for rapid development. Regrettably, many of these are yet to be met." And so, the immediate task was two-fold. One, the administration decided to clear what the governor referred to then as the "Augean stable" and cleanse the machinery of government for the new administration, and secondly, to evolve a unique machinery of their own which will make them execute programmes to meet the aspirations of the people and achieve results, which even some of their opponents who were honest, will commend.

To underscore the clear headedness to what he intended to do, Aku further declared in his acceptance speech on October 1, 1979 thus:

> As governor, I am the father of everyone in this state irrespective of how they voted in the last general elections. I hereby appeal to those who disagreed with some aspects of our manifesto and voted for the other parties as a result of this disagreement to join me in the challenging task of building a decent band contented Benue State.

Benue's problems were the result of neglect and apathy by successive governments and regimes. During the reign of the Sardauna's Northern People's Congress (NPC), the late Senator Joseph Sarwuan Tarka led the Tivs who constitute more than half of the population of the state in resisting the NPC and campaigned for a separate statehood.

Most of the other tribal groupings in the state, like the Idomas and Igalas, however, were won over into the NPC. The Action Group led by late Chief Obafemi Awolowo struck an alliance with Tarka's United Middle Belt Congress, UMBC, but could not form the federal government. The result was that Benue State was largely left out in the scheme of things. The Igala and Idoma areas, however, received some substantial patronage. They were given ministerial appointments and top positions in the army just to punish the Tiv ethnic group for daring the northern establishment.

This condition did not improve until the early 1970s when some Tiv people began to occupy positions at the executive cadre. There was no godfather to help them either in the Federal Civil Service or in their own state and Gomwalk, the then governor of Benue-

Plateau State, had no intention of helping.

Makurdi, which is largely a Tiv territory, was reduced into a mere local government headquarters. There was the story of a contract which was given out in the late 60s to link Aliade, headquarters of present day Gwer local government (a Tiv area), to Jos but which was suddenly stopped. Admissions into higher institutions were even said to be discriminatory. Even the army dragged its feet in reversing the situation. The first Tiv man to be a Brigadier was appointed during the Obasanjo/Yar'Adua military regime.

The story began to change in 1979 when Aku took over the reins of leadership. He laid out purposeful initiatives to put the state on the course of intense and all round development. His administration championed the opinion that the Federal Government should not just consider the state for special assistance simply because the state "belongs to the NPN" or gave the party the highest number of votes in the presidential election, but to make up for the decades of neglect the state had been through.

By October 1980, barely 12 months in office, Aku took far reaching steps to correct this imbalance, knowing fully well that as an indigene and son of the soil, he stood to benefit in the progress of the state and to lose if things turned awry. He grouped the state into four zones for the purpose of even development and political appointments. The zones were, East with Adikpo as headquarters. North East with headquarters in Gboko and Mid West with Otukpo as its headquarters. The fourth zone was the West and Ayangba as the headquarters. Through this system, his government went through the zonal headquarters in order to get direct and effective contact with the people at the grassroots.

It was common knowledge that the state was one of the most backward in the federation. Not unexpectedly, the new government under Aku encountered some teething problems, and like some other states in the federation, the rule of the men in uniform left a trail of havoc and a string of debts. The state was committed to several projects without any indication of how they would be funded. But the administration was set to carry on with these projects alongside its own exploiting all avenues for finances.

To enable him implement the programmes of the party on whose platform he rode to power, Aku embarked on an institutional reorganization. For a start, three new ministries were created. They

were the Ministry of Rural Development and Cooperatives; Ministry of Housing and Environment and the Ministry of Economic Planning.

By 1981, even though the administration had just gone halfway, there was evidence that the state was different and that despondency had began giving way to renewed zeal and determination. A vibrant spirit had taken over and the morale of the people began to glow.

At his first meeting with top civil servants in the state, on October 24, 1979, Aku did not mince words in reading the riot act to them as what he cherished most. He told them a new dispensation had just set in. In his words:

> I demand probity in the use of government finance ... Some of you have established businesses and these are patronised unduly. Some officers and sub-treasurers have even played dubious roles by not paying legitimate contractors for jobs done. I demand a stop to all this! (*New Times*, 1982).

A retired civil servant in the state told the author in confidence that civil servants and some NPN politicians began to groan under Aku's disposition to stringent management. He disclosed that Aku's style had closed off all tributaries to corruption and "fast bucks." But that was Aku's style and he was not ready to backtrack.

At the inception of the civilian administration in 1979, the story of Benue State was a familiar one; whether it was told by visitors or travellers who just passed through the state. It was one-chorus line that "The state is not developed at all." Makurdi, the state capital was serviced with just one major road. At that time, the only higher institution in the state capital was the Murtala College of Arts, Science and Technology which was later transferred to Ugbokolo and transformed into Benue Polytechnic. The existing infrastructures on ground when Aku took over the reins of leadership even where they existed at all were very weak and inadequate. Business and commercial activities were at its lowest ebb. The true picture was that of gloom, stagnation and depression.

These were some of the grey areas in Aku's petition against former Benue-Plateau governor, Police Commissioner J.D. Gomwalk, when he accused Gomwalk of nepotism, corruption and abuse of public trust.

The opposition party leaders too were on the same page with

Aku. In an opening speech to the meeting of the northern leaders of the defunct Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) in Makurdi July 1981, erstwhile Benue State chairman of the party, Mr. Chia Surma, sounded more like an apologia than a welcome address. But it well underscored the general revulsion of the indigenes of Benue irrespective of party affiliations to the pathetic state of the entire state in general.

Surma said:

> I wish to apologise to you, that Makurdi is not developed at all. It is not the fault of some of us here. It is the fault of the Military; they did nothing for Benue State as you can see from the poor state of Makurdi town. Strangely enough, Benue State gave the ruling National Party of Nigeria the largest percentage of members in the State Assembly. In fact, Benue belongs to the core of the NPN, yet the Federal Government has totally neglected Benue State. If the State belongs to the NPN then it should have been declared a disaster area because it is the least developed State.

Without doubt, Benue State was one of the least developed states in the federation. Other states like Imo, Anambra and Oyo had made several protestations to the federal government for being neglected. Somehow, Benue, which had about the strongest case, surprisingly kept her problems to herself until Aku began courting the media to start highlighting the problems of the state so as to call the attention of the Federal Government to help out.

Such problems like transportation and many other social amenities were so acute. There was only one major road in Makurdi. The main market and the state secretariat was a sorry sight. There were no recreational centres, no meaningful hotels that could even be said to have any standard. That was what propelled the administration to speed up the construction of Makurdi International Hotel so as to boost the state's tourism development in partnership with foreign investors.

Although the hotel project was conceived with some dents of corruption by the military government, it received Aku's blessing. Toryima Orga, former Special Adviser to Aku on Economic Matters, told the author that Aku's vision and drive to develop the state was hinged on three possibilities. One, that it was possible Nigeria could remain one indivisible nation but with a loose federating structure. Secondly, that owing to the growing agitations across the country,

Nigeria could restructure the federating units in terms of population and size; and thirdly, which was much more important on his mind, was that in the event that Nigeria breaks up, what will be the position of Benue or the Tiv people?

He said it was on this score that Aku began toying with the idea of a BINDA State movement and began organizing Benue and indeed the Tiv as if it was an independent country. He laid foundations to build a support base for industrialization. His economic policies also flowed from this thinking. And of course, all his economic policies took a queue from this mindset.

That is why he took keen interests in the establishment of key platforms that could generate economic growth and empower the people of the state. These included the moribund Lobi Bank with the Korean Exchange Bank of South Korea as its technical partners. KEB initially had 40% shares in the bank. Lobi Bank commenced commercial operations on August 21, 1982. It is also to the credit of the former governor that former South Korean President Chu Doo Hwan performed the opening ceremony of the bank during a state visit.

Governor Aku's ability to influence the federal authorities to include Benue State on the itinerary of the former Korean president outside Lagos when he visited Nigeria in connection with the bank project was more than a passing significance to the vision he had for the industrialization of the state since the country returned to democratic rule in 1979. The bank was to serve as the main financing house to the development of the state in all facets.

What made the Korean deal important to Aku was that the Korean Exchange Bank (KEB) had international connections. He had envisaged that such a bond would facilitate Lobi Bank's easy link with foreign financial institutions for its transactions abroad. Besides the bank partnership, the Korean co-operation, in the thinking of the administration would help in improving agricultural production as well as the establishment of small scale industrial projects in the state.

The establishment of University of Technology in the country was the brainchild of Aku. This proposal was for Benue State but was taken over by the federal government. His idea was that indigenous graduates from these institutions would better fulfil the dreams of making Nigeria an industrialized nation than it's over dependence on foreign based technology. It was to also provide the

manpower needed for farmers and boost industries.

The aggressive land clearing programme that his administration embarked upon was highly criticized by political opponents. They alleged misplacement of priorities. But the administration felt otherwise. They reasoned that the land clearing programme would give the farmers and the cooperative groups in Benue the platform to cultivate food and cash crops in large scale with the aid of mechanized implements. The establishment of industries was to create the needed markets for them and avoid waste. Unfortunately, the administration of Brig-Gen. Atom Kpera, which took over after the 1983 military coup, was short sighted in this direction and only saw the 'corrupt' tendencies that they had wanted to see.

Aku had also invited Messiner Engineers to grow rice in the state on a large scale just as Hawaiin Agronomics were saddled with the responsibility to cultivate soya beans. And of course, the establishment of Taraku Mills, which was built at a cost of ₦17m, was to turn soya beans into various products.

In another show of foresight, Aku wrote President Shehu Shagari, proposing an agricultural development template for Benue State and Nigeria that would have put not just the state but also Nigeria in the bracket of nations with high economic gains in the agric sector. In a letter with Ref No. AI/68/VOL.1/81 and classified as "Strictly Confidential", Aku outlined various ways by which Nigeria could benefit from the rich potentials that abound in Benue State. It was dated September 17, 1981.

The letter followed discussions Aku had with President Shagari and his Minister of Agriculture, Alhaji Ibrahim Gusau, for a special request for a joint federal participation with the Benue State Government to grow her national requirement for rice, soya beans and maize. Aku wrote:

> There is a sense of urgency with the food situation in this State and, I believe, nationwide. And although I look forward to an opportunity to discuss this with you, the matter in my mind is so urgent that I feel I ought to reduce my ideas to writing in order to provide a basis for any action you may deem fit.
>
> Of our recent monthly import bill of about ₦1,000 million, well over one quarter of it is on food items. In spite of this, food prices continue to rise even in rural areas of Benue State. The situation in the cities across the country is bound to be the same if not slightly worse. And while such an import burden could be

sustained during the very recent months of our second oil boom, I doubt that the period of economic hardship which we have now entered into would permit us such comfort. I doubt that we could reduce our food imports as successfully as imports of other items since people must continue to eat.

I am certain you are already thinking of these matters and only want to seize this opportunity to repeat my request made to you shortly after I assumed office. I do have a programme that so far has been most successful. This is the programme of large scale land clearing, followed with a combination of large scale Western type commercial farming operations and improvement in the traditional farming methods. We are unable to expand this programme as rapidly as the food situation justifies, because we are hampered by a lack of funds.

At the moment therefore, I am seeking your direct assistance only in the area of land clearing and the development of infrastructure.

I am calling for direct assistance from you because of this urgency of the food situation which I have mentioned. For as long as the nation's economic prospects were bright, there was by implication ample time within which to get the food situation under control. Accordingly, I was quite prepared to and indeed I worked through existing Federal agencies such as the National Grains and Root Crops Production Boards, the River Basin Development Authorities etc. I am indeed maintaining my contacts with these agencies and with their parent Federal Ministries of Agriculture and of Water Resources Development. Now that I foresee a permanent change in our nation's economic fortunes, I feel that the need for urgent drastic action would necessitate a certain amount of work outside the usual norms of our agencies.

For I know that a combination of market realities and Western intrigue, will keep oil prices at their current or even lower levels affecting the nations revenue seriously. I believe therefore that if there was a way in which assistance came directly from you, it would be much faster than the two years I have tried to work through Federal agencies.

For example over a five to ten year period, we in this state can put over 1 million hectares of cleared land under rice, soya beans, maize etc. With irrigation and commercial methods, we can triple the traditional yield of 1.5 tonnes per hectares, and be able to crop twice a year. This will result in a minimum yield of 3 million

tonnes of rice for consumption in cities across the nation. Even if we achieved only half of that target, we would still single-handedly almost meet the rice demand situation estimated in the new development plan to be about 2 million tonnes by 1985. We could supply all of Nigeria's rice and have surplus for export.

I am encouraged by recent written reports that, between the months of January and June 1981 or in just six months, Thailand exported about $700 million worth of rice. We are among their top ten buyers.

You probably already know that in recent years our population has been growing much faster than our food production. According to the new development plan, between 1976 – 1980 the output of rice and most of the other major crops grew by about 2.5% per year. If these figures are true, and I have no reason to doubt them, then we are already many years behind in our production of sufficient food for the country. The new plan also hopes that this average rate of food production would quadruple to 4% per year in order just to meet our food requirements. I am convinced that unless we introduce new drastic measures in food production, the food situation will worsen.

I want to assure you that I don't think the nation is helpless. We in Benue State for example have the capacity and the determination to achieve this food goal. We are fortunate to be generally in the Zone of Nigeria free from the extreme effects of drought and erosion. We are one of the ideal food growing areas and should be encouraged.

While we recognize that it is the duty of Government to take palliative measures for areas of the nation ravaged by drought and by erosion, we believe that a more rewarding policy would be to give even greater assistance to areas that can produce the required food. For Benue State, we know that the Government is already operating one of several companies engaged now in land clearing and later in commercial food production. Farmers Co-operatives have been organized ready to seize opportunities offered by land clearing and other extension measures. We are hampered only by lack of funds and are now being forced to consider the possibility of external financing for this project. We hope that, even in the current national situation, we can expect federal support of our external financing attempts.

Over the next five years, our funds requirement for this program will be slightly over ₦200 million. Much of the expenditure will

be on heavy earth moving machinery for land clearing and irrigation systems. Other expenditure will be on small relatively inexpensive tractors so effective in Korea and Thailand. We can provide details of these expenditures. Of the domestic amounts required, most will go on resettlement of indigenous populations that may have to be moved to more convenient spots within the same area in order to make room for large acreages for mechanized cultivation.

Indeed, one of the major development problems I am facing is the age old habit of particularly the Tiv to some extent the other peoples of Benue to live in scattered single family homesteads. But converging them slightly in order to make room for agriculture, I would be reviving side benefits of easier accessibility, more effective provision of social amenities etc. We expect that over a ten-year period, about 1.5 million people will be converged in this fashion.

In many ways, I realize that this is the wrong time to ask for such direct financial assistance.

Your own funds situation must be desperate and you may not have much flexibility in selecting your priorities. However, it is because of this very expectation of a worsening financial situation that makes this request more valid and urgent. In a way we have a cause and effect situation here.

My request, if granted, will put us on a more stable development course to the extent that it will greatly ease the food situation. I believe it, therefore, deserves your personal attention and I urge you to consider it.

Yours truly,

Aper Aku
Governor, Benue State

Makurdi International Hotel Commission of Inquiry, 1981

Makurdi International Hotel project was the brain child of Benue Hotels Board. But for lack of finance, this project was transferred to the Ministry of Trade, Industries and Co-operatives as a State Government project. It was conceived on the eve of Group Captain Bayo Lawal's government. Lawal was, at that time, military administrator of Benue State. It all began on July 5, 1979 through an undated Benue State Executive Council Memo marked 54/79 and signed by Dr. M.Y. Attah. The Council had noted the urgency and necessity to establish an International Hotel and approved in principle, the establishment of a 300 beds hotel and the appointment of O.K.G. as developer/financier. Curiously, the office stamp on the Memo showed it was the EXCO decision of August 16, 1979.

The haste in which the project was conceived left a lot of yawning gaps with questions. The mock foundation ceremony was hurriedly laid on September 20, 1979, barely ten days to the expiration of Group Captain Lawal's tenure as the country returned to democratic rule on October 1, 1979. So when Aku took over, he set out to ascertain government's involvement and clear doubts where necessary, in the performance of duties by government officials in the award and planning for the hotel project.

The administration was keen on the project. It believed it would boost tourism industry in the state. But there were some grey areas it wanted to tidy up. That accounted for the Commission of Inquiry into the entire process of award of contract and any other issues related therewith. Aku envisaged that, with the five-star hotel in Benue, the state would be placed on the same pedestal with Lagos and any other major cities in the country, including the Federal Capital Territory.

The contract, originally awarded to Oestereichische Klima-Technik Gesellscheft MbH, OKG of Austria, was revoked after it was discovered that the company was bankrupt. It was re-awarded to a French company, Bouyges. The new contract was signed around September October 1982 in Paris. The agreement was for the company to finance and build the Makurdi International Hotel at the cost of ₦29.9 million. The hotel structure had twelve floors. By the time the military struck on December 31, 1983, ten floors were already completed.

And since the main opposition party in the state, the NPP was always up in arms, using *The Nigeria Standard* as its main arsenal of war against the NPN government in Benue State; they threw up more dust in the direction of the hotel project. In its May 2, 1982 edition, the paper reported on its front page that an unnamed commissioner in the Benue State cabinet was arrested and detained in Paris, France, for 24 hours for allegedly entering the country without a valid visa. The paper claimed that the said commissioner had gone to Paris to collect ₦2.5millon kickback resulting from the contract awarded in respect of the Makurdi International Hotel. It was all propaganda.

Dan Agbese, then Director of Information dismissed the publication, saying there was no truth whatsoever in it. He explained that following the signing of the contract in January, 1982, the French Bank Worms of Paris submitted its application to COFACE for Credit Insurance. Negotiations were held in Paris by the state delegation in April but there was as yet no confirmation of the loan approval by COFACE at the time the report was made.

He disclosed that "it is only after COFACE may have approved the loan agreement, that the Federal Ministry of Finance will be approached to guarantee the loan. Until the loan is guaranteed, the question of syndication of the loan cannot be said to have come in. Until the loan is syndicated, no funds exist for this project and therefore it is the height of ignorance to expect anyone to talk of receiving a so called kickback."

As a matter of fact, he explained further: "If COFACE fails to approve the bank request, then the transaction would completely come to a halt. On the other hand, whatever negotiations have been done would need to the approved by the federal government before being effected by virtue of its inherent power to give or withhold its guarantee to the loan agreement depending on how acceptable the agreement might be. Naturally, there is not much to do other than to depend on the guidance of the federal ministry of finance."

On the doubts expressed in the public over the actual cost of the hotel, the former Director of Information described as "uninformed and jaundiced minds," those who appear to lay "undue emphasis on the fact that initial cost of the hotel was mentioned to be ₦19m and that the hotel was now being built at ₦30m." In the first place, Agbese noted, "the quotation of ₦19m was not a turnkey quotation and the Austrians owned up that OKG in fact intended to seek an

increase of the facility. For those in the hotel business, it was clear that O.K.G under quoted to win the contract in the heat of the rush to award the contract before the new administration took over. Apart from this, costs have escalated since 1979 both overseas where the equipment will be acquired, "while locally, labour and construction costs have more than doubled since then." He explained further that "compared to similar projects in the country, the Makurdi International Hotel will in fact be built at a cheaper cost than others."

This was how diverse views were expressed in the public on the position of the report of the Justice Lawrence Anoliefo Tribunal, which the state government had set up to scrutinise the transactions on the Makurdi International Hotel. This too, Agbese responded to, promising that the administration would be releasing the report of the Justice Anoliefo Tribunal of Enquiry on the Makurdi International Hotel as soon as the white paper on it was ready. He, however, pointed out that it must be borne in mind that "the main aim of setting up the tribunal was not vindictive or punitive but mainly to establish that correct procedures were followed in the award of the contract. It is unfortunate that the *Sunday Standard* should allow itself to be used in spreading deliberate falsehood against the Benue State government and some of its top functionaries. Such a course of action serves no useful purpose, political difference notwithstanding," Agbese maintained.

The Justice Lawrence Anoliefo Commission of Inquiry was empanelled by Governor Aku in exercise of the powers conferred on him by section 2 of the Commissions of Inquiry Law (Cap 25) and all other powers enabling it in that behalf with the following terms of reference:

(a) To inquire into the circumstances surrounding the award of contract by the Benue State Government to Oestereichische Klima-Technik Gesellscheft MbH otherwise called O.K.G. for the construction of the Makurdi International Hotel and determine the propriety of Government commitment and investment in the hotel project with the said O.K.G.;

(b) To pry into and examine the contract documents and ascertain whether the Government interest was properly taken care of by all the officers responsible;

(c) To ascertain and identify the role or roles played by all persons connected with the contract and make appropriate recommendations on the propriety or otherwise of their actions;
(d) To examine the circumstances that have led to a delay in the execution of the hotel project and ascertain which of the parties has been responsible;
(e) To inquire into and ascertain the security of monies already committed or paid by Government in connection with the project and recommend steps necessary to recover monies already paid towards the implementation of the project;
(f) To determine in the light of its findings under the foregoing sub-paragraphs whether irregularities, if any, have been committed by any person or persons connected with the Hotel project and recommend disciplinary or other measures to be taken against any such person or persons;
(g) To recommend measures necessary for the take off and full implementation of the hotel project;
(h) To examine any other matter incidental to the foregoing and make all such recommendations on all such matters connected with or related to the hotel project as deemed proper by the commission.

Those that made up the panel included Justice Lawrence Anoliefo, Chairman; Peter Nor; Benard I. Hom, Lead Counsel to the Commission; Mamman Mike Usman, Counsel to MG Consultancy Group and Gordon Esa, Counsel to E.A. Akiga. They were all sworn-in on Wednesday 12th August, 1981. The Commission held its inaugural meeting on the 19th of August, 1981. All its sittings were in camera.

In the first instance, the main contract for the hotel was between Osterreichische Klima-Technik Gesellschaft GMBH, (O.K.G.) and the Government of Benue State. The O.K.G was introduced to the State Government by one Alhaji Mamuda Kano. The O.K.G knew that they would not be allowed to operate in Nigeria until they were duly registered and got approval from the federal government to operate as an off-shore company but in connivance with some state government officials, the company presented a false identity and

energies on irrelevant issues rather than concentrating on major substances for the good of those we have sworn to protect and to serve faithfully. You will recall that during my electioneering campaign, I made promise to the people of Benue State that their past neglect by the previous administrations will be corrected. I still live by this promise. I assure you that this state will have its fair share of Federal Government support in all the endeavours to better your lot.

In addition, I believe that your Governor, Mr. Aper Aku, who is a renowned crusader against injustice, a committed and dedicated person to his people and the nation, will, through the cooperation and support of his people and Federal Government effectively tackle your problems. There is abundant evidence of this in his policies.

Once again, on behalf of myself and members of my entourage, I wish to acknowledge our sincere thanks for the wonderful hospitality of the people of Benue State. I am overwhelmed at the support my party and this administration have received from the people of Benue State. I am equally appreciative of the generous gifts I have received from the Government and the various communities in the state. The happy memories of this visit will linger in my mind for a long time.

No doubt there is a forward march to progress in this state as evidenced by all I have seen during my three days sojourn in your midst. I wish the government and the people of Benue State continued success in all directions.

God bless and thank you all.

Chapter

War within, War without

There were undoubtedly, internal conspiracies within the NPN to wrest power from Aku. And this was occasioned by his loss of confidence among the Tiv elites coupled with the ambition of some leaders of the party who wanted to see the governor sent out of the government house at all costs. There was this fear by these leaders that power and patronage may continue to elude them if he remained in office.

For example, the sharp disagreement between the state governor on one hand and Hon Isaac Shaahu, then Minister of Communications, on the other, with people like the former Speaker of the Benue State House of Assembly, Hon Ayua Num was a pointer. The misunderstanding was in the public domain such that Aku himself admitted before the NPN state delegates' congress held on November 21, 1981 in Makurdi that it had been "resolved".

"I am glad to say that following a meeting we held with our party leaders, the misunderstanding has been resolved. The final settlement was the fresh elections held in the Tiv-speaking areas to elect local government leaders of the party." The result of this election, Aku told the state congress of the party, "have been accepted by all the parties concerned." Aku told the NPN state delegates congress to take up their roles as leaders and supporters of the party to help ensure that the new educational policy do not fail

because as he puts it "the government needs your co-operation to explain this policy on education to the people and to ensure that our political enemies do not exploit the apprehension of the people. Together, we fought to win power and together, we must fight to stay in power and execute policies in the overall interests of our people."

But that was how far the resolution of the conflict between Aku and his traducers could go. What followed after did not show any sign that such a compromise was reached in the first place.

Aku even sounded tough in that speech. He cautioned Chief Obande, the state chairman of the party to "watch out for some individuals who are bent on causing confusion in the party. They must not be allowed to have their way." The governor stressed that, as responsible party members, it was their responsibility "to ensure that no one or a group of persons does anything to cause confusion in order to destabilise the state or give their political opponents excuse to cause mischief."

The crises that engulfed the Tiv area of the NPN pitched Aku and Shaahu against each other. It was the fight for political leadership of the Tiv people after the demise of Tarka. And it got some leaders of the party thinking on the best way to arrest the drift of the party. This was coming barely a year after Tarka had died. And late Chief G.A. Atedze, a frontline politician, did not find this funny. He, alongside seven other party elders, initiated peace moves to douse the tension. They feared that the crisis was not only shameful and unpatriotic, it was capable of degenerating into a total break-up of the party into two warring factions.

On July 24, 1981, at the Makurdi residence of Alhaji Gwagwada, the first peace meeting was held. Present at this meeting were G.A Atedze as Chairman, Alhaji Gwagwada, Hon. J. Ayua Num who was Speaker of the Benue State House of Assembly, J.K.Acka, Denen Tofi, Madam Kwaghnzuul Naikyo, Madam V.S. Adzape and Agan Dankaro.

Atedze declared the meeting open by 12 noon and outlined an eleven-point agenda to tackle the crises of leadership in the NPN between Aku and Shaahu. The meeting, among others, discussed the implications regarding the struggle for the political leadership and governorship in Tiv area and the possibility of having personal and private discussions with the governor and the minister on the existence of two factions of the NPN in the Tiv area.

Apart from the position of the governor as regards the 1983 general elections, the peace committee made it clear to the warring leaders that the peace move was the last effort and anyone found to be encouraging the division of the NPN into factions after this initiative will be recommended for expulsion from the party. At the meeting, a broad-based peace committee with five members' each from the former twelve local government areas in Tiv area was constituted. They also resolved to meet with the governor and Shaahu immediately on the outcome of the meeting.

Governor Aku was contacted immediately on that Friday 24 July, 1981 and he accepted to meet with the peace bearers the same day. In the course of the discussions, Aku denied that he had any conflict with Shaahu. He also denied knowledge of Aku's faction of the NPN. However, the committee members impressed on the governor to discourage his supporters who may want to fan the conflict further.

The next day July 25, 1981, the committee met with Shaahu at his Gboko residence. The former minister made a number of allegations against Governor Aku and the state secretary of the party, Thomas Degarr. Shaahu told the committee that he was being blackmailed before the Tiv people by the governor. He listed three instances of false allegations made against him to support his claims.

One, Shaahu told the committee that he was wrongly accused of giving out cars and motorcycles to some NPN supporters in order to gain their support for the post of governorship ahead of the 1983 elections and that he was inciting some NPN members against the governor. In all this, he denied any complicity. Shaahu then went ahead to accuse Aku of hatching a grand plan to frustrate all the former UMBC members in the NPN out and according to him, install young brigade in the Tiv area. He also told the committee how the governor objected to nominations of some young Tiv men for federal political appointments.

Shaahu's allegations against Aku were weighty and so the committee decided to convene an enlarged meeting of selected supporters of the NPN in the Tiv area immediately. The meeting took place on Saturday 22 August, 1981. Five delegates were nominated from all the twelve local governments in the Tiv speaking area.

At that meeting, Atedze was more emphatic on the expectations of the committee. He declared that the issue of political leadership in Tiv should not be assumed, but like the late Tarka who evolved

over time due to his commitment to the cause of the Tiv people, anyone with such ambition must work and follow the footsteps of the late Tarka which he took before he was accepted as the political leader of the Tiv people.

By the time the meeting ended, far reaching decisions were taken after the two leaders had met separately with the committee. They were advised to reach out to each other and bury their grievances for the sake of the party and Tivland in general. The committee also selected a few of its elders to embark on a tour of the twelve local governments in the Tiv speaking area and inform all the party's supporters the resolution of the crises. They then appealed to all its members to stop identifying with any faction but see the NPN as one big family.

Already, Aku's opponents were cashing in on the new policy on education in the state which the government had introduced for the parents to share in the burden of investing in the human development of their wards as a result in the rising cost in education. And of course there were initial fears over that policy. Aku himself admitted that much but counseled that the policy "was not evolved as a punitive measure against any parent. It was evolved in order that all of us, in or out of government can provide collective shoulders to bear the burden of educating our state."

He also believed that the aspirations for economic growth and the demands of industrial development the state was yearning for will mean nothing unless the educational system of the state is tailored to meet these and other peculiar needs the state was laying out.

The entrance of Ezekiel Akiga for the governorship contest against his long standing friend further created cracks in the ruling party. This also helped oil the battle from NPP led by charismatic Paul Unongo. With this, the NPP seemed to have found its voice after it had hitherto been smothered with stunning electoral defeat in the 1979 year's elections.

The NPP in Benue State was powerfully backed by the Plateau State government owned newspaper, *The Nigerian Standard* against Aku and they kicked a lot of dust in the state. They got their news reports in prominent positions published in the paper. They enjoyed the past time of accusing the NPN government in the state of siphoning part of the money earmarked for the late Senator Tarka's burial ceremonies.

Unfortunately, Aku had, in a television interview, mistakenly claimed that about ₦25, 000 was used for the burial ceremonies of Tarka. He had realized his mistake and even promised to let the public know the exact figure when the Secretary to the Government, who had been instructed to compile the figures, was through with it. It was obviously a slip of tongue, since the cost of chartering two airplanes alone far outstripped ₦25,000 not to mention boarding and lodging for the guests at the funeral.

Nevertheless, the NPP cried wolf. They had claimed that the governor spent more than the ₦25,000 he claimed, and even distributed another ₦23,000 to some of his commissioners. The NPP's noise power always kept the NPN government on the defensive, hitting them at their sore spots with cheeky ease.

The godfather image that Aku carried weathered the storm above the din and cross exchanges of politics in the state. He oftentimes maintained an inscrutable silence in the face of provocative insinuations from the NPP against his administration. Aku's reputation as 'Mr. Clean' stood the test of time and he carried it along and remained averse to corruption in his government.

In spite of the hue and cry over the late Tarka's funeral expenses by the NPP, the average Benue man believed that the former governor was above the petty thievery that was alleged. In fact, some key politicians in the state, who constituted part of the war chest against the Aku administration, told the author that most of the allegations against the former governor were politically motivated. For instance, the sum of ₦150,000 he withdrew from the treasury as expenditure for Tarka's burial was properly accounted for.

In response to the allegations by the NPP on the burial expenditure of Tarka, Aku had accused the opposition of mischief when "they picked on just one point when I was answering questions on a monthly television programme called "Ask your Governor". I made a slip of tongue by saying ₦25,000 instead of ₦250, 000. In fact, I said that my Secretary to the Government is compiling the total report on how much money was spent but as far as I know it could have been up to ₦25,000 where I was to say ₦250,000. Now for anybody who followed what transpired during that time can even imagine that a person saying ₦25,000 under the circumstances could not have meant so, taking into account that I sent about 10 people to London to bring the late Tarka's corpse, and I had to use government funds to buy their tickets and lodge

them."

The political war of attrition between the NPN and NPP developed to an ugly twist when an element of assassination was added to it. The then Deputy Speaker of the State House of Assembly, Innocent Audu Ogbeh, and the State Commissioner for Works and Transport, Joseph Orkar, were waylaid one night in July of 1982 on their way to Makurdi after a trip to Ugba. Orkar fled unhurt from his car, which was said to be riddled with bullets. His attackers, it was alleged, went into his car and after a casual search left, leaving all documents, and properties including an expensive Grunding radio intact.

This happened shortly before the National Party of Nigeria had raised an alarm that there were plots by the NPP to eliminate all their top leaders in the state. The Secretary of the State Wing of the NPN, Thomas Degarr, had told reporters earlier that there had been similar attempts on them (NPN members) when they were returning from a rally near Otukpo. Though there were no evidences found by the police to trace these attempts to the doorsteps of the NPP, the NPN insisted that the NPP knew about it. Honourable Julius Atom, an NPN member of the State Assembly, and the Works Commissioner maintained that it was a political assassination attempt.

However, the other 'target' of the suspected assassins, Ogbeh refused to lay the blame on any one or group, saying that in his political life, he tries not "to be uncharitable to my opponents. Though it could have been them, I am not sure." But another NPN member of the state assembly, Captain Ochega, said "It is likely that the NPP could have done something like that because of their behaviour in the State." Orkar and Ochega's positions were understandable.

Another dimension was brought into the whole episode by the NPP. The party had a completely different story to tell. Augustine Utsaha, a private legal practitioner who was the state secretary of the party denied the allegation in very strong terms. (Utsaha was to later become a High Court Judge and retired as the President of the Customary Court of Appeal in the state.) He claimed that the Commissioner (Orkar) involved in the incident was actually waylaid by a jealous man who allegedly spied the honourable Commissioner carrying away his "madam." He threatened to let the public know about that but never did.

The UPN, in the state led by late Chia Surma, also occasionally let off vitriol against the NPN. But theirs was not as much organized as that of the NPP.

One of such most frontal and disturbing UPN attacks against Aku was the allegation that Chief Peter Vande Acka, the Political Adviser and close confidant to Aku was a spy for the United States of America's Central Intelligence Agency, CIA. Upon investigations, it was discovered that Acka had an old personal score to settle with his accuser. Nevertheless, the governor ordered for an enquiry, but the Nigerian Security Organization turned up with no incriminating evidence against him.

As this was going on, there was growing political tension in the state. The NPN accused the NPP of plotting to eliminate all the top NPN men in the state and of planning to destabilize the state. The NPP in return accused Aku of victimization.

In all of this, Aku maintained a calm disposition, but from events that followed, particularly how his political scheming forced Paul Belabo and Paul Loko, both leaders of the NPP to submission, tells of an iron cast personality. He said he believed politics should be practised in a way that all the people should learn to live together for the benefit of the unity of the state, community or nation. He lamented certain actions of the NPP which worried him. Aku alleged that his opponents, particularly the NPP engaged in what he called "very deliberate acts to destabilise the government."

In many cases, Aku told journalists at a parley in the heat of this cross fire with the NPP that the best way to respond to such situations was to "refrain from overreacting, and give time for things to clear off." He said, even though he was under pressure to use "certain powers to handle certain situations, I feel that it is not necessary as of now. As a matter of fact, the consensus of those who measure the parameters that make for the stability of the country, have all agreed that even as I speak, Benue State is still the most stable in the country. I think it was when this knowledge came to some people that they thought they may start doing certain things to discredit my very self and my government but also cause instability in the state. I have decided to be very cautious about how I react to all these. I have got a lot of means by which I can react, either by going to the police or to the courts or by engaging other papers to use bad language against them and so on. But I feel it is not worth it. I don't feel I have to be on the defensive where it is not necessary."

Aku explained later that even what he had spent on the burial of late J.S. Tarka alone had gone far beyond the sum the NPP were brandishing. He said the state government had to charter two flights on the eve that his body was brought to Lagos, and had to arrange for accommodation and feeding for the thousands of people that came for the funeral at the time. There were also several thousands of people of all status from the state who constituted the kind of support Tarka had during his lifetime.

It was the understanding of Aku and his lieutenants to ensure that, as much as practicable, those willing to come and witness the burial of Tarka were able to get transport to come. During this period, one could not take things for granted. So much was involved in way of security and other logistical issues, more so that the whole nation came to give honour to the late political icon. It was, therefore, unimaginable for anyone to have sensibly thought that it was too much, even if Aku had said half a million naira.

When Aku made the slip of tongue on the burial expenditure of Tarka, the NPP went to the State Sub-Treasury in Makurdi and, through some dubious means, got most of the documents connected with the burial and held a press conference immediately. Before this time, they had already started working and the first allegation they made was that the government spent something between ₦0.5 million to ₦1.2 million during the funeral ceremonies.

Aku admitted that all the documents displayed by the NPP in relation to Tarka's funeral were true but added, in a media chat with journalists, "It was very true and in my view and in fact to any honest person, one has to realize that if I wanted to pocket government funds that was not the occasion for it and that as a governor of a state, you have all kinds of ways including the security vote which I don't under normal circumstances sign for. So if I wanted to enrich myself why should I have signed for the money? I signed them voluntarily and I knew what I was using it for. So I have no cause for any apologies whatsoever on the matter. They displayed the receipts and of course the usual *Nigerian Standard* gave it bold-front page coverage. I decided to say nothing."

Secretary to the State Government, Obadiah Tebu, in responding to the NPP's allegations, revealed that the money earmarked for Tarka's funeral was ₦150, 000 out of which about ₦136, 000 was spent. The officers who controlled the funds at the time were said to have paid back the balance to the treasury. Even with this, the

NPP's propaganda machinery would every day thereafter, go and take one aspect in a different context and hold a press conference and give false impressions.

For instance, the NPP alleged that six commissioners siphoned ₦23.000. It was discovered later that these commissioners did actually sign and collect the amount, acting on the instructions of the governor and the maximum any one commissioner collected was ₦1, 000 considering how many people they were likely to take care of by themselves during the ceremonies, from their communities in the state.

In one case, the party claimed it was ₦16, 000 that was collected by each commissioner. Ironically, this sum was a part of the money used in buying the tickets and other things for those who travelled to London. So they just kept on playing with the figures, whipping up the impression that the NPN government was wasting funds.

At some point, the opposition talked about ₦47,000 (forty-seven thousand naira) and ₦45,000 (forty-five thousand naira). The governor had already admitted withdrawing ₦45,000, which was basically for security matters. There were also expenses of traffic which amounted to ₦2,000 (two thousand naira). So the whole sum added up to ₦47,000. But in their publication, they gave the impression that Aku drew a separate amount of ₦47,000 and then another ₦45,000 was withdrawn and that there was conflict in the figures. That was what the NPP engaged the NPN government in the state with the connivance of *The Standard,* a newspaper owned by the Plateau State government. It was part of their campaign strategy to try and destabilize Aku and his government so as to make him unstable in the discharge of his duties. Incidentally, it made him stronger.

In the meantime, Aku's main opponent for the 1983 elections and the ex-Steel Minister, Paul Unongo, felt that he should be recognized as Tiv leader. At the burial alone, he was alleged to have bought 16 cows and given out at least ₦1,000 to each local government area.

Aku also queried Unongo's generosity, and demanded that the NPP also explain how their leader who just left the Shagari government as minister was able to be so free with cash, saying, "how much does a minister get a month that he was able to do this? Where was he getting this money, how much does he earn a month and for how long was he a minister? At that time too, Unongo was

said to have begun dishing out cars all over the state, preparatory to the polls. However, the NPP could not proffer answers to some of these questions.

Aku said he held his peace and refused to take any untoward action. He told some journalists when they cornered him that, if he had taken his opponents to court, they would have been made to answer questions because they had already made a lot of libel against him. Besides, as is the case in the current democratic experience, if he had wanted to use his powers as the man in charge of security in the state, he could afford to send some of them behind the bars for 24 hours, release them, put them back there again for 24 hours again and again.

In an interview with *New Times*, Aku said "I can do all these and they can't do me any bloody thing. Until I am satisfied enough for all the things they have been doing. But then what is the use? Will that help my state become more stable? So I decide to stay put believing that some of these things are just blue smoke that clear with time."

After the death of Senator Tarka, the NPP tried unsuccessfully to make many believe that the fortunes of the NPN in the state would diminish. The party felt they should have been given the leadership of the state. And that is why they created impressions that the popularity of the NPN was going down. But this was far from the truth. Even during the 1979 elections, doubts were expressed as to whether the NPN would hold its own in Benue.

In the 1979 elections, many people believed that the NPP was going to win in the state until when the results came that people were surprised to see that in terms of percentage, Benue State had overturned the table by polling the highest of all the states that NPN won with 76 per cent of the votes cast.

In 1983 general elections, however, the heat that was turned on Aku both from within his party and the NPP gave Unongo a good showing. From the results that started coming in before it was stopped, there were insinuations that the NPP won but official results declared by FEDECO, the electoral body gave the NPN an overwhelming victory. That was still contested in the courts when the military struck on December 31, 1983.

Governor Aku's battles for political survival were on many fronts. One of such was the creation of new local governments. In early 1980, the Benue State House of Assembly passed the Bill for the

creation of new local governments in the state. Shortly after that, the governor appointed a four-man panel to look into the desirability of creating new local governments in the state. On April 30, 1980, the panel submitted its report. When the list of the local governments was made public, some pro Tarka loyalists began peddling rumours that the governor was working against the interest of the late senator.

The Bill for the creation of new local governments derived its strength from the campaign promises Aku made before his elections. The four-man panel was headed by Mr. J. B. Adewumi. It also had late Justice Lawrence Anoliefo, Peter Ango and J.I Atsor as member-secretary. All the three members of the panel, apart from the secretary Aku appointed for this exercise, were non indigenes just to give an impartial and detached judgement on the issue.

Among the local governments created was Nyamatsen, consisting of Mbakor, Mbatierev and Mbatiav kindreds. The headquarters of the local government was situated at Wannune, Tarka's birth place. But there were protests from Mbatiav and Mbatierev leaders. Similar problems on the creation of the new local governments arose between the people of Makurdi/ Guma, Ndzorov/ Agasha, Tiev and Shitire/ Loko areas.

Naturally, the people of Mbakor clan, where the late senator hailed from, were happy while the people from Mbatiav and Mbatierev clans, who considered their numerical strength to be more, were not disposed to this arrangement. And they did not hide it. Leaders from these two kindred expressed their displeasure to the governor in very strong terms.

For the purpose of peace and good administration, the governor directed that both sides should sit together and discuss with leaders from Mbayion and Yandev to serve as observers. This view was accepted by Jirbo Akpu, an elder from Mbakor. Akpu also gave names of other elders whom he had considered would assist in the dialogue to help settle the matter in the usual Tiv friendly and traditional way. The governor had even told them that whichever way the matter was resolved will be accepted by him.

But unknown to Aku, some politicians, both within and outside the NPN went and advised leaders from Mbakor clan not to attend any of the peace meetings. Instead, they caused the elders from Mbakor to write a letter to the governor, implying that it was because the governor did not like the late Senator that he was bent on

punishing Mbakor. Aku considered this action to be rather rude.

At an enlarged meeting the governor convened with elders from Jemgbagh which also comprised of Mbakor in an attempt to resolve the issue, the governor denied allegations that he was working against the interest of his political leader. Rather, he told his audience what he has been doing to the family of the late Senator, and his plans to immortalize Tarka's name. He accused those he called "political opportunists" for wanting to soil his name just to score cheap political points by advising the elders wrongly.

In a bid to placate the warring communities over the tension that arose from the creation of these new local governments, Aku forwarded an amendment to the House of Assembly and among issues explained the feelings of Mbatiav and most Mbatierev to the legislators. But it turned out to have worsened the situation.

Having been blackmailed as an anti-Tarka man, the governor, in the proposed amendment he sent to the legislators, asked the lawmakers to retain Wannune as the headquarters of Nyamatsen local government area, the constituency of Mbakor, Mbatiav and Mbatierev. But again, he added: "since the resistance from Mbatiav and Mbatierev is so strong, if they opt to remain with Gboko local government area, as they did express to me, they should be allowed to stay with Gboko. In that case the new local government should be simply called Mbakor Local Government Area with its headquarters at Wannune."

Unfortunately, the House of Assembly thought otherwise. They moved the headquarters of the new local government to Ikpah in Mbatierev and renamed the local government as Gbemacha local government. Aku tried to convince the people from Mbakor that this new twist did not carry his imprint because according to him, he was not consulted by the House and that he, like any other person only heard it on the air. He even pleaded with the leaders of Jemgbagh as well as Mbakor not to hold any grudges against him as a result of this.

Since the governor was looking ahead for re-election in 1983, he tried to wriggle himself out of blame and placed the actions of the state legislators at the door steps of his political opponents, whom he accused of promoting these machinations. For the interest of the party, Aku asked genuine party supporters to identify such people and disown them because, according to him, "Our party needs unity at this time more than anytime else to cope with our election efforts."

But it made those who branded him as anti-Tarka to be proven right. The newly created councils were still trying to take-off when the military struck.

Governor Aku and his Deputy, Isa Odoma

The signs that the Aku/Odoma ticket would experience a bumpy relationship showed up early. As the parties were getting set for the new dawn in democratic governance around the later part of 1978 to early 1979, the NPN in Benue State zoned its political offices. The governorship was zoned to the Tiv speaking area, while the deputy governorship slot was to be taken by the Igalas. The slot for the chairmanship of the party was to be filled by Idoma. While the Tiv people took time in selecting the flag bearer, and because of the number of candidates and the acrimonious manner the selection lasted, somebody hastened this process in Igalaland. There are insinuations that Isa Odoma, who emerged from this contest, influenced his nomination considerably. And this was very odd.

There were a couple of persons from the Igala speaking axis who positioned themselves to take the position. Apart from Odoma, there were also Dr. Peter Ochalla and Dr. Abubakar Usman. Among these three, Usman was said to be popularly touted to take the running mate ticket. But the way Odoma's nomination was done, it shielded other contestants from the contest. For instance, it was timed to coincide with the absence of Dr. Usman, who was away to Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj. And before he could return, the exercise was concluded. He was, however, compensated with his appointment as Minister of State for Defence.

And so, by early 1979, the deputy governorship candidate was known even before the governorship candidate was selected. All the same, the leadership of the Igala caucus was ready to stay with their decision.

Incidentally, the presumptuous actions of Odoma gave birth to the enmity between him and Aku. Before Aku emerged on November 2, 1978, Odoma was said to have taken sides with a particular candidate against Aku. Alhaji Sule Iyaji, one time commissioner and later the deputy governor to Aku in 1983, told me in an interview that "Whoever that emerged as running mate ahead of his boss, had to play his card discreetly."

Unfortunately, Odoma did not exhibit such political wisdom. He jumped into Tivland and took sides with a candidate that eventually did not win. That was the beginning of his problems with Aku. When the results came, his candidate did not emerge.

Aku, aware of how Odoma had gotten himself entangled in the politics of the gubernatorial candidate outside of him, told the Igala caucus that he was the candidate and must be allowed to pick the person he would want to work with. Surprisingly, the Igala leadership denied Aku that privilege. They insisted the running was zoned to them and they had picked somebody. This created a major technical problem right from day one. And it remained through out the tenure.

Uji told the author that Aku had his preference in Dr. Ochalla among the candidates from Igala area. Unfortunately, he was implicated in a government probe white paper which made the electoral body disqualify him from the contest. This and the instigated conflict between Aku and the Attah Igala, which was placed at the doorsteps of Odoma, made their relationship frosty.

When it became clear to him, he more or less imposed himself on Aku, Odoma began playing up ethnic sentiments against the governor over political appointments into key positions. Odoma was alleged have prepared a list of commissioners and permanent secretaries, showing that most of the sensitive ministries were being manned by the Tiv. This included parastatals. He felt that the Igala people were being neglected. This got to the ears of Aku who felt betrayed and this also influenced the frosty relationship between the governor and his deputy.

Odoma was alleged to have continued with plots to destabilize the Aku administration through spurious policy advice that would have discredited the administration and put the governor on the defensive. One of such was a well constructed strategy and blackmail campaign against the former Chief Judge of the State, James Adesuyin. It was to get Adesuyin out and in his place, appoint Justice A.P. Anyebe as the state Chief Judge.

Adesuyin, who hailed from Offa in Kwara State, was inherited from the old Benue-Plateau. He was one of the few High Court judges from northern Nigerian government that late Premier of Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, trained at the English Bar and called to Queens Inner Temple. He did not have the regular university education but was nonetheless versed in law.

Anyebe, who was next to Adesuyin in hierarchy, also felt it would be much more benefitting if he takes over as the Chief Judge of the state. Moreso, those working for Anyebe to get the seat felt since the Tiv have the position of governor, Speaker of the state legislature while the Igalas had the deputy governorship, they reasoned that the Idomas should pick up the slot of the Chief Judge of the state. And they felt Anyebe was more qualified since he had obtained the regular law university degree and had been called to the Nigerian Bar. That was when Anyebe and his supporters began working in concert with the Deputy Governor Odoma to kick Adesuyin out. Those who claimed to know insisted the plot began immediately Aku took over on October 1, 1979.

To solidify their strategy, the deputy governor had directed that security surveillance be mounted on every move Adesuyin made in the state, both in his judicial deliveries, administrative and social life, just in a bid to blackmail him before Aku. One of such surveillance reports dated 14, May 1980 and signed by M. M. Anagende, Acting P.A.S. (Security), gave details of how S.P Ejale, a State Counsel in the Ministry of Justice met Chief Okpani Ukpoju on the 'instructions' of the Chief Judge in relation to the suit instituted by Ukpoju over the confirmation of appointment of Ella Okwudu as District Head of Otukpo.

Several other damaging reports were filed by the security surveillance team against Adesuyin to the deputy governor. Some of these security reports alleging varying degrees of 'misconduct' against the former Chief Judge were filed on 19 May, 1980, by one F. O. Ibe. He signed the two reports on behalf of the Assistant Director in the office of the Nigeria Police. In one of the reports, Adesuyin was accused of being too sympathetic to the defunct Unity Party of Nigeria, UPN and therefore lost the confidence of the state government controlled by the NPN. It was the entire plot to get him out.

The last straw that nailed Odoma's relationship with Aku was a ten-page letter the deputy governor wrote and brought to Aku to sign so that it could be sent to the Minister of Justice and Attorney-General of the Federation, Richard Akinjide, SAN. A copy was to be sent to the Chief Justice of the Fedration too. In the letter with reference No. Q/44/120 dated October 16, 1980 and captioned: "Re- Chief Judge of Benue State of Nigeria," the 'governor' listed several misconducts against Adesuyin. He was accused of

frustrating the appointment of Benue State indigenes as justices to the Federal Appeal Court, appointment of High Court Judges in the state, creation of more judicial divisions and also his alleged bias in the tussle for the Otukpo district head stool which Okpani Ukpoju was contesting in court.

The letter asked the Minister of Justice to advise Adesuyin to retire voluntarily or he would be compelled by the State House of Assembly, using the instrumentality of Section 256 subsection (1) paragraph (a) of the 1979 constitution. Some of his cabinet members advised Aku to withhold assent to that letter. The governor declined signing the letter, but rather sought more legal advice and counsel from two other lawyers in his government, Adejo Ogiri and Vincent Uji. When the intent was revealed to him, Aku never took any other advice from his deputy seriously. He would rather consult with Ogiri, Uji or even the Chief Judge on many other legal issues than Odoma.

This bitter relationship continued till the NPN was set to go for the 1983 general elections. From the body language of Aku, it was clear to Odoma he was no longer needed in the team. Insiders say this frosty relationship between the two made the duo relate with each other with suspicion. To save himself the trouble, Odoma "voluntarily" stepped down his ambition in the 1983 polls.

In a 12 paragraph letter to Governor Aku, Odoma formally wrote to disqualify himself from the elections. He recalled how in December 1978 Aku petitioned against his being made deputy, saying that he would not be able to work with him (Odoma) and that a new deputy governor be looked for him. But even at that, those who were close to the party disclosed that Aku on his own had made up his mind to pick another deputy and not Odoma. That was how Alhaji Sule Iyaji, then a commissioner in Aku's first cabinet, emerged.

Meanwhile, Adesuyin waited in the wings patiently and bidded his time to take his pound of flesh from Anyebe. It did not take long to come. In 1981, Anyebe was asked by the State Chief Judge and the Benue State Judicial Service Commission to explain his role in the illegal detention of a High Court Clerk, one Mr. Jeremiah Nakume. But Anyebe resisted any disciplinary measures against him. He filed a civil suit to challenge the powers of both the Commission and the Chief Judge to discipline him for that action.

When the case was first mentioned on November 18, 1981, the presiding judge, Justice Sylvester Onu, ruled that the case be settled

out of court but Anyebe appealed against the decision.

But on Tuesday August 24, 1982, Justice Anyebe, through his counsel, George Uloko, withdrew the suit, saying he took the decision because of the confidence he had in the judiciary. He commended the steps taken by the representatives of the Commission to settle the issue. He said it had confirmed to him that the commission was performing its duties without fear or favour.

Part of a letter sent to Anyebe by the Commission and signed by Secretary to the Commission, Mr. J.T. Kure read in part: "I am further directed to inform you that, following the passionate plea made by a delegation on behalf of the rest of the High Court Judges, the Commission has now decided to let the matter lie, solely for the respect the Commission has for the judiciary and thereby guard against any attempt by anybody to drag the image of the judiciary in the mud."

But not long after that, Anyebe was again caught in the twist of fate for allegedly using a gun to shoot at one of his sons. The incident took a dramatic turn thereafter.

By this time, Uji was redeployed from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to become the Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice. When Uji was confronted with this, he sought advice from three of his very senior state counsels, Bernard Hom, Rekiya Okpanachi and one Barrister Olofu. Two of these were Uji's Bar Call mates. They all recommended prosecution. Former Chief Justice of the Federation, Justice Sodeinde Sowemino, was also contacted and he did not withhold his assent. In a terse response, Sowemino was quoted to have told Uji to go ahead with the prosecution, saying, "every judge must be sober. If any judge lacks this quality, then he is not fit to be on the bench."

But Uji sought to get more legal teeth if he was to prosecute Justice Anyebe. He needed a fiat from the Attorney-General of the Federation since it was a federal offence. Kehinde Sofola, who was the Attorney-General at the time, asked the commissioner to come back at a later date. Uji could not make it back, as the military seized power shortly after. The case, however, continued even after the Aku administration was sacked by the military and Justice Umaru Eri convicted Anyebe of criminal offence and possession of fire arms. The Court of Appeal sitting in Jos upheld the decision of the lower court but the Supreme Court quashed the verdict on the grounds that no fiat was obtained. After his acquittal, he never

went back to the bench but only enjoyed his retirement until he passed on.

Since Isa Odoma failed to get Aku to make grievious mistakes, he was left with no choice than to bow out from the 1983 elections contest. Below is Odoma's letter to Aku declining to contest 1983 elections with him. It reads:-

Mr. Aper Aku,
The Governor of Benue State
Government House, Makurdi.

Re-1983 Gubernatorial Race

You would recall that we became seriously acquainted since December, 1978, when you were nominated governorship candidate and I deputy governorship candidate of our great party in the 1979 general elections. You would also recall that shortly after, you wrote a petition against me that you would not be able to work with me, that a new deputy gubernatorial candidate be looked for. The matter was however, resolved at the party level and we were asked to run together in these two various capacities. Fortunately, we were voted in October, 1979.

Since then, we had been working together and without much problems, although most of the time, it has been my restraint and mature approach to events that had made things a lot easier for us. The relationship became glaringly strained at the wake of two separate creation of state demands from my area of the state Okura and Kogi State demands, with you being inadvertently dragged into supporting one section of it through some evil machination from a few people from that area.

You would recall that, since this problem of nomination started almost 9 months ago, we have never sat down to discuss together as friends. The worst happened when, on Wednesday the 21st July, you telephoned me that you were going to Ayangba, my home town, on the 23rd day of July 1982 to meet NPN members there to inform them

that you would formally seek re-nomination for the 1983 race. When I asked you whether I could go with you, you said it was not necessary. You went and held your consultation and so-called support was given to you. Since then, one event leading to the other and one rumour mongering leading to the other have not helped the situation.

To mention one particular instance which has so much humiliated me and has overawed me in my dealing with you, the re-constitution of the Dekina Local Government Caretaker Committee. You would recall in this respect that when you were about to re-constitute all the local government caretaker committees in the state, the party caucus met and decided that the commissioners and legislators of the various areas should meet and submit names to you. These names you were to submit back for discussions at the party caucus. Instead of doing so, you received these names from the commissioners and legislators and re-constituted the various caretaker committees without reference to the party caucus and worse still no reference was made to me. The Dekina one, which is my home local government, was serious and which I drew your attention to when you returned from America. I wrote several letters to you apart from oral discussions. The commissioner from the area and the majority leader from the area also protested to you over the issue. I gave various reasons, one of which was a serious one that I was not on speaking terms with the person you named as the Chairman of that caretaker committee which happened to be my own local government area. The Dekina local government branch of the NPN executive members were invited here by you and they did tell you in plain language that the chairman and one other member were unacceptable to them. Yet you went ahead and directed those people to be sworn-in. As a result of this, the three other councillors who were appointed with the chairman declined the offer and, until two days ago, the Dekina Local Government Caretaker Committee had been functioning with only two members; this is my own local government area and yet I am the

Deputy Governor of Benue State.

In the circumstances, therefore, and after due consultations with my immediate family and my good friends, I have come to the conclusion that our experiment had not been a successful one and to pretend that all is good and to seek to go together for another term would not be in the interest of both of us, the NPN and the State.

I have, therefore, decided that in view of all the circumstances surrounding our experiment of being together, all the things that have happened to me, most of which I have not been able to enumerate here for lack of space and all the humiliation which I have suffered and I am likely to go through for the next 11 months, I would opt out of the 1983 gubernatorial race. In other words, I would serve my term of office to the end of September, 1983, God willing, and retire to my private life. You are, therefore, free to choose anybody of your choice to run with you. Here of course, I have to warn that in doing so you must put the interest of the party and the State first. There are no alternatives to these.

In all events, although I have suffered a great deal, I have lost a great deal both politically and materially, I must thank you and the people of Benue State for giving me the opportunity to serve as the first Deputy Governor of Benue State. One promise I must not forget to make is that as a foundation member of the NPN, I remain forever convinced in the ideals of that noble and great party and I shall continue to do my best, not only to give my personal support to the party, but to ensure that I work very hard to convince those who are yet to join it.

In the circumstances, therefore, if you happen to win our party's nomination as flag bearer of the party in this state in a truly, honestly and democratically conducted congress, I shall not only actively be involved in the campaign for your 'success but will follow you to all nooks and cranny of the state to ensure that our great party continues to enjoy the confidence of the people of the state. I am also to inform you that I am at the disposal of the presidential campaign team at any time and shall be

prepared to join the team either within the state or anywhere within the country ...

Finally, sir, let me say a few words particularly for people like you who occupy very highly executive positions, and who may in the process of discharging the enormous duties attached to their positions forget one thing, that is to say, all civil authorities in this world derive their powers from God, and whoever it pleases God to give this authority to must exercise it in a way that is to the glory and the fear of God. One of the cardinal ingredients of remembering this is to bear in mind that, in the discharge of all our duties, we must be fair to those who God gives us the authority to rule.

This letter is copied to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the National Chairman of the NPN, Benue State Chairman of the NPN and the Benue State Secretary of the NPN for their information and necessary action.

I wish you the best that you honestly deserve.

Thank you.

ISA ODOMA

Deputy Governor of Benue State.

Odoma's letter to Aku brought to the fore, the bitter relationship they both shared in the offices they occupied. Even though the letter potrayed Aku as a mean politician, it nevertherless underscored his earlier rejection of the imposition of a deputy on him by the Igala caucus. It also exposed the mindset his former deputy had when he worked his way around the Igala caucus in 1979 to become a running mate to Aku under very curious circumstances.

Others believe that, given the circumstances that Aku found himself, as a human being, he did what he had to do to survive an unfriendly deputy. A close aide to the former governor confided in the author that Aku had a political career he had to uphold and he wanted to progress as a politician. There was nothing wrong with that. He reasoned that when you meet ideal politicians, they will

say there is that aspect of vindictiveness in every politician. It all depends on how the vindictiveness is taken. Perhaps, Odoma got it all on a wrong premise.

Chapter

9

'Minority States and Groups'

By the time J. S. Tarka passed away in March 1980, leaders of the minority ethnic nationalities felt the need to regroup and find a common ground to push forward their positions. By definition, minority states are made up of various ethnic nationalities outside of the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo that are in the majority in their states of domicile. The minority groups, therefore, are the smaller ethnic nationalities within the states of origin. They constitute the mosaic texture of nationalities in the Nigerian political history. And over the years, since independence, they've alleged marginalization in terms of recognition in appointments and elections into strategic positions of authority in Nigeria.

Leaders from these tribes begun agitations to press home demands that they be so recognised in both appointments and elective positions. The agitations peaked after results of the 1979 presidential elections indicated that majority of votes that gave Shehu Shagari the presidency were from the minority states. However, the agitations then were not as co-ordinated.

Chief I.I. Morphy had hosted one of the early meetings of the group in Lagos just before the death of Tarka. So after Tarka's demise in March 1980, the leaders from the minority states again held their first major meeting at the Gboko residence of the late Senator on Tuesday 24th June, 1980. Those present at the meeting included

the Chief I.I. Morphy from old Cross River State, who convened the first Lagos meeting, with T.N. I Ntaji also from old Cross River State, J.C. Obande, Benue State; C.I. Monkom, Cross River State, Senator Ahmadu A. Ali, old Benue State; Bitrus Tat, Plateau State; Chief Edwin K. Clark, old Bendel State; Selcan Miner and M.A. Buba, OFR, all from Plateau State.

Others were the host Governor, Aper Aku; A.Y. Eke, from old Bendel State; Emmanuel Isa Odoma, former deputy governor of Benue State; J.Ugbah Uyeh, Benue State; Dr. Okoi Arikpo, Cross River State; J.H. Bassey, Cross River State; Tayo Akpata, Bendel State; Hon. David Mtuem, Gongola State; J.M. Din, Plateau State; L.L. Borha, Bendel State; H.O. Ero, Bendel State; Jibir Girema, Gongola State; P.V. Acka, Benue State; N. Owuru and Chief S.B. Nwikpo, Rivers State.

It was at this first meeting in Gboko that the tone was set for the minority agenda to roll. They met under the auspices of 'Minority States and Groups of Nigeria'. At that meeting, those who formed the first nucleus of the group agreed to attend another meeting which they had slated to hold in Kaduna with the aim of further articulating their strategy and speaking with one voice and aim. The meeting in Kaduna was strategic for the group for many reasons. One, it provided the group with the opportunity to test their influence. A number of decisions were taken during the Gboko meeting which gave the group confidence to expand their support base outside its shores.

The meeting opened at 2.00 p.m with Chief Morphy, the convener nominating Aper Aku, Governor of Benue State as Chairman, and Chief E.K. Clark of old Bendel State as Secretary. Peter Vande Acka, Aku's Special Adviser on Political matters, was nominated to serve as Assistant Secretary. They were unanimously adopted by those present at the meeting.

By the calculation of the leaders, the 1979 elections proved that the minority ethnic tribes in Nigeria actually formed the major force in deciding the winner of the presidential polls. And that the minorities could stand as a formidable political force against the might of the three major groups; the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and the Igbos if they became one. From the available statistics arrived at after the elections, it could comfortably be said that the emergence of Aliyu Shehu Shagari as President of Nigeria was at the pleasure of the minorities. It was with this hindsight that the leaders from

these sub groups in the political equation of the nation were emboldened to team up and pursue a common agenda.

The voting pattern in that election showed the Yorubas voting *en bloc* for Obafemi Awolowo's Unity Party of Nigeria, UPN; while the Igbos stood behind Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe of the Nigeria People's Party, NPP. The north was divided into three major camps. Kaduna and Kano States were the exclusive preserve of Malam Aminu Kano's People's Redemption Party, PRP. Old Gongola and old Borno States voted for Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim of the Great Nigeria People's Party, GNPP. The remainder of the north was taken over by NPN's Shagari. But largely, the NPN recorded much of its gains in the minority states.

Morphy told his comrades that the Minority States must find a common ground to seek for the rights of the people called minority tribes of Nigeria. He explained that the meeting was held in the Late Chief Tarka's house as a mark of respect and because he stood for the course of the minorities.

Taking a quote from Tarka's speech at the NPN convention in Lagos in 1979, he emphasized, among other points, that the minorities must rise up. He noted that no majority group will give us political power. "You have made me the first Executive President." I am prepared to lead you in this course if you so request of me."

In highlighting the role of minority tribes to national stability in the Nigerian political development, Morphy recalled the leading role played by some minority leaders in keeping Nigeria united. These included General Yakubu Gowon, the late Chief Anthony Enahoro, Joseph Tarka, Chief (Dr.) Okoi Arikpo and many others whom he said made sure that the Federal Military Government did not give in to "Biafra".

To stave off the secession plot during the Nigerian Civil War, minorities of Eastern Nigeria also opposed secession and delegated their leaders namely; Chief E. O. Eyo, Chief S. J. Umoren, Chief Andrew Bassey, Chief Wenike Briggs, Chief Dappa Biriye, Pius Ojua and Chief I. I. Morphy to join the rest of Nigerians and fight against the breakaway of "Biafra". This they did successfully and aided Nigeria to remain one united country.

One of the strong points that will benefit the minorities, Morphy told his fellow agitators, is the unity of Nigeria. He insisted that if the minority tribes allow Nigeria to disintegrate, they will suffer for it, since according to him, "the major groups will take us in small

groups into their new nation and deal with us as they wish."

And of course they resolved to remain with the ruling party, the NPN to achieve this. They refused to be drawn out to form a new political party. He said the salvation of the minorities, however, lies in their unity within the ruling party. Morphy encouraged his colleagues to ensure that they stay back in the NPN and make sure that the party wins the 1983 elections in all minority states. And this was strategic. The minorities were conscious of their numerical strength which gave the NPN block votes in the 1979 elections. They resolved to use the same strategy for the reasons that Morphy gave thus: "we are a power base and that we contributed in no small measure to get him (Shagari) elected First Executive President of Nigeria."

The group was optimistic that they will get the blessing of President Shagari to achieve this goal even though they still felt the major tribes were getting the bigger share in the government at the time. It was resolved that the group would meet the president and put their demands before him.

To the Tiv people, Morphy expressed gratitude for their support during the course of Minority struggle in Nigeria. The struggle, he insisted, "is not yet over, we still need this support to keep Nigeria united and strong. Chief Awolowo once said "if I had a people like the Tivs, I will change the face of Nigeria'. Tiv people, I appeal to you to keep together under one leadership."

But again, there was this problem of leadership among the minority groups. There was no defined leader for them and this was sort of a big challenge. There was more of individual ethnic leadership than a collective front for the ethnic nationalities. It was, therefore, resolved at that meeting for someone who would lead in their fight to get what belonged to them. The lot fell on Governor Aku. Aku seemed to have been the natural choice. It was from this meeting that he began rallying the minority groups and positioning them for a common effort.

By electing Governor Aku to lead the minority groups, the component units in the ethnic coalition acknowledged the support of the Tiv people in the struggle of minority identity in Nigeria. But since the struggle was not yet over, Morphy admonished the Aku leadership to sustain the support to keep Nigeria united and strong. Aku's leadership began moves by eliminating the posture where minorities in Nigeria were looking more like political orphans.

Aku had a very broad view of Nigerian politics at the time. He also saw the danger of the minorities falling out of place in the scheme of things in the country. And so when the leadership of this group fell on him, he was ready to re-invent the Minority Caucus in the party which in the end scared the other majority groups.

President Shagari was quoted to have told some members of the minority caucus in his cabinet during a council meeting to 'include the Fulanis when you the minorities' meet. Fulani are also minorities too.' Although the statement looked simple, it was weighty.

Aku, Clement Isong and Melford Okilo were buoyed by the renewed appeal to the plight of the minority, as demonstrated by the Morphy charge, and this gave new zest to this movement. They would have raised it to certain heights if that republic had survived the greed of the military. The reason for this is that, if you add up the minorities in this country, they constitute more than sixty percent of the population. But being small and in disparity, the majority groups find it far easier to cooperate and continue to swallow up these tiny groups. And this was bound to change with time.

And because Aku was also a man with his own dreams about Nigeria and the future, he felt that politics had to be anchored on certain long term political philosophical projections. From his body language and public utterances, he was quick to tell you that you would have to know your place in society before engaging in a battle of wits at the national level. If you were too small a group, then you have to join hands with other groups to strengthen yourselves. And therefore among minorities, they decided it was time to stand up to the majority tribes and demand recognition for the rights into certain political offices that were hitherto an aberration to the smaller units in the federation.

Perhaps, political developments today in Nigeria are unwittingly as a result of these struggles. Struggles which began in the Middle Belt Congress and the South-South Movement also resulted in the Mid-Western State. Even the Willinks Commission inaugurated by the Tafawa Balewa administration was all slight acknowledgement of the inevitability of the entrenchment of the position of minorities in the country. Otherwise, it was always Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. That, itself, had its own problems because it presumed that nobody else existed.

Slowly, with the activities of people like J. S. Tarka and others in the past, it became known that not everybody across the Niger is

Hausa-Fulani. This was the struggle Aku continued with many other comrades.

But the flurry of activities of the group got a further kick from a letter Chief Anthony Enahoro sent to Aku. It was dated 28 February, 1981. It was written on a "Rainbow House" letter head. In it, Enahoro reminded Aku, Okilo and Dr. Clement Isong to wake up and give more bite to the issues regarding the minority tribes in Nigeria before it was too late.

Enahoro wrote: "I think it only fair to let you know that we here are beginning to feel that your good self and Governor Okilo have withdrawn from the prospects for the minorities which were held out to us some time ago. Perhaps the situation appears different from your end, but we who are committed to the cause of the minorities feel that nothing has happened to obviate the crying need for a Minorities Front which you and Governor Okilo thought should be built up for future eventualities."

He challenged the trio of Aku, Okilo and Isong whom he said might be like-minded but seems to have abdicated their responsibilities for the minority tribes to act fast before it was too late. Enahoro said if these three failed to rise up and do what needs to be done, "then obviously we all have to wait until providence supplies the awaited hero. I unfortunately, am a believer in causes, and my whole experience in Nigerian politics teaches me that there can be no stability in Nigeria until the minorities get justice. If you, Governor Okilo, Governor Isong, Governor Lar, and others are not our deliverers, then we have to await the coming of our saviour." Enahoro's letter obviously gave the needed pep to ignite new zeal in the minority rights struggle.

As a result of Enahoro's letter, the NPN minority leaders at a meeting held in Makurdi on April 30, 1982, resolved to work together openly to enhance the aspirations of their people. They said that, henceforth, they would resist what they called the "gang up" by the major ethnic groups to make the minority areas their hunting ground. They even canvassed that all minority groups in the country join the NPN for unity, progress and stability of the country. The meeting also adopted the paper presented at a conference on political stability in Nigeria by Aku at ABU Zaria and recommended that the party adopt the ideas contained therein.

Chief Edwin Clark, the former Treasurer of the NPN who spoke with journalists at the end of the Makurdi meeting, blamed the

Nigerian Civil War on the disagreement among the major ethnic groups. Clark observed that Nigeria has always been a three-legged pot but warned that anything that will undermine the presence of the minority in the country will be opposed.

Those that attended the one-day closed door meeting included former Senate President Joseph Wayas, former governors Aper Aku of Benue State, Melford Okilo of Rivers State and Dr. Clement Isong of Cross River State. Also present at the meeting were former military governor of old Bendel State, Dr. Samuel Ogbemudia and Chief Edwin Clark. Former Speaker of Benue State House of Assembly, Ayua Num and Senator Ameh Ebute, as well as several other personalities from across the minority states were also present.

But nothing comes without a price. The NPN top leadership, particularly the northern establishment, began to be uncomfortable with the trio of Aku, Okilo and Isong. In each of their states, they faced stiff opposition from certain elements even within the NPN. They were all haunted. Isong was the most vulnerable, as he was unable to secure a second term ticket. He lost to Chief Donald Etiebet, who was elected governor in 1983. Isong's protest fell on deaf ears. In a letter to the national Secretary of the NPN, Suleiman Takuma, dated October 31, 1982, Isong alleged that the conduct of the nomination exercise showed a collusion between the chairman of the nomination committee, Christopher Okojie, and those he called 'Wayas Group.'

Isong's letter was copied to both President Shagari and the party national chairman, Adisa Akinloye. He complained, among other things, that Okojie "deviated from the guidelines and engaged in unwholesome practices in order to ensure victory for the Wayas' group." He asked the National Executive Committee, NEC, of the party to disband the Okojie committee and set up a new one which he said would be neutral. Chief Morphy also backed Isong in the protest. Sensing that the leadership of the party at the national level had made up their mind against him, Isong headed to the courts to challenge the outcome of the gubernatorial primaries in his state.

But the NEC of the party would not back down either. In a communiqué it issued at the end of its meeting held at Green Springs Hotel, Ibadan, on Wednesday, November 10, 1982, NEC ordered Governor Isong to withdraw the court case against the party or face expulsion from the party. The communiqué, which was signed by Simon Shango, the party's National Publicity Secretary, also

announced the setting up of an eight-man committee headed by Shettima Ali Monguno to take petitions arising from the conduct of the governorship primary nominations.

In Rivers State, Chief Okilo faced an impeachment apparently influenced from elsewhere but executed by the State Assembly. They accused him of unconstitutionally usurping the powers of the legislators by dissolving statutory bodies and corporations set up by law.

On Monday May 17, 1982, the Rivers State House of Assembly commenced the impeachment processes against Okilo and his deputy, Dr. Frank Eke. Fourteen members of the House made up of one member each from the NPN, UPN and twelve from the NPP signed the impeachment notice. Okilo was to answer 10 charges, while his deputy was asked to respond to eight.

Speaker of the Rivers State House of Assembly, Chief Rosebury Briggs told his colleagues that one-third of the lawmakers had served him notice for the removal of the governor and his deputy as required by the constitution. He said the "duty before this House is an onerous and enviable one which demands courage, fortitude and uprightness from all of us." He had advised members not to prejudge the issues or draw conclusions but "follow the constitution."

By August of 1982, Okilo was suspended "indefinitely" by the state wing of the party for alleged "anti party" activities. Acting State chairman of the party, Benjamin Alamina said the governor was suspended for flouting directives of the National Working Committee and the National Executive Council. The two bodies had asked Okilo to re-instate the state secretary of the party, Pidiki Atuwo and Boma Peer Kio, the State Legal adviser who were removed from office following a vote of no confidence passed on them by the state executive of the party.

Aku faced similar stiff oppositions, if not much more. Like Isong and Okilo, there were speculations that his opposition was financed from outside of the state but he would neither dismiss it nor deny. This, and perhaps what was obtained in other states of the country, created the atmosphere that the military utilized to push the civilians out in 1983.

In the heat of all of this, some prominent Tiv politicians advised Aku to drop his minority right crusade so that he would not run foul with the aspirations of the leadership of the NPN. But by then, it was too late for him to step back. He had made up his mind to

fight on. Some politicians in the NPN fold at that time were said to have even advised Aku not to go on with the minority agenda because they felt he was definitely going to clash with the northern establishment, who saw that movement as a threat to their collective interest. For instance, Senator Suemo Chia told the author that because "Aku was desperate to take over the Tarka leadership; he thought that playing the minority card will add to his credentials."

Unknown to Governor Aku, the NPN leadership at the national level became uncomfortable with him and began shopping for his replacement *(See official Correspondences between Aku and former National Chairman, Adisa Akinloye in Chapter 11)*. A top member of the government and himself a frontline member of the NPN minority caucus was said to have told Shagari in confidence that the Tiv had a replacement should the party decide to dump Aku. The person touted to replace Aku then was Senator Suemo Chia. Although Suemo declined the offer, he gave one condition: that he would only contest the 1983 governorship if Aku was not running for a second term. In all of these, the governor was undeterred to pursue his vision for the rights of the minorities in Nigeria.

Members present at this meeting all agreed that political power generates economic power and that there was need to institutionalize the organization. It was agreed also that the existence of an organizational structure of the minorities within the party and in the states will not be out of place. It was further agreed at the meeting that such an organization should not be operated in secret. Therefore, there was need to have officers. They also commended the commitment of late Tarka and the current efforts by Chief Morphy to sustain the tempo of strategically placing the minorities within the right political consciousness in Nigerian political evolution and thereby making it possible for members to meet, saying it was a happy re-union and observed that it was a good omen that the inaugural meeting of the body was held in Tarka's residence.

Emmanuel Isa Odoma, the Deputy Governor to Aku, raised the bar at the meeting. To him, the move to unite the minorities was a welcome idea, but he asked: "who will bell the cat after the death of Tarka who fought for the rights and aspiration of the minorities?" The minorities, he observed, need political and economic powers urgently and this is because the majority tribes have taken all the juicy positions in the federal set up, leaving the minorities without economic force. Odoma's thought provoking contribution provided

the tonic for the group to make a representation to President Shagari after the meeting. By this time, the minorities were in the majority in at least nine states and in other smaller groups in other states across the country.

Selcan Miner from Plateau State moved a motion that the body, "Minority States and Groups" be formed and maintained as a permanent group. He was seconded by Mr. L.L. Borha.

The nature and content of the motion read as follows:-

- Realizing that the unity of this country depends very much on the strength of the minority elements,
- Realizing that it is the minority group that played a major role in the election of the First Executive President in this country,
- And realizing that the same unity, peace and stability ought to be guarded and preserved at all costs, be it resolved and it is now hereby resolved that there is need for the Minoriy Group within the N.P.N. to form a strong "Pressure Group" for the protection of Nigeria as an indivisible entity, and for the protection of the rights of the Minority Group in Nigeria."

Governor Aku, while summarizing the various points made at the meeting, re-emphasized the need and aspiration of the minorities within the minorities. By this time, states were getting ready for the local government elections. Aku said there was need to assess and examine problems faced by the minorities in their states, to enable the forthcoming local government elections to be won. He supported the resolution to form the pressure group within the NPN in order to articulate the minorities case.

On the Kaduna Convention, which the party was to hold in a short while, he advised each state to sort out its requirements. At this juncture, certain States indicated their interests to contest certain positions at the convention. The meeting resolved and set up a "Steering Committee" of two members per state to meet at the Benue State House in Kaduna and articulate positions before the convention proper.

At the close of the meeting, Governor Aku moved the motion for the Gboko meeting to be adjourned. Two days later, precisely on Thursday June 26, 1980, the meeting reconvened at the Benue State

House in Kaduna and held for three days consecutively, from 26 to 28 June 1980, ahead of the special national convention of the NPN where the minority group began to test their strength.

The Kaduna meeting kicked off at 8.am at Benue State House. It became necessary to hold the meetings in Kaduna because of the convention of the party which was to take place there. Three meetings were held. One was before the convention, the second during the recess of the convention and the last was immediately after the adjournment of the convention to November, 1980.

At Kaduna, the Minorities' Group scored a remarkable achievement. Chief Anthony Enahoro moved a motion which abruptly brought the convention to a standstill and which followed the change of date and venue for the NPN national convention. The leaders of the group saw this as a demonstration of the need for the unity of the minorities for a purposeful goal. The result of that motion was that the minorities were given equal opportunities of representation both by equity and performance.

Those present at the Kaduna meeting included its chairman, Aper Aku, Chief Melford Okilo, the Rivers State Governor; Mr. Selcan Miner, Chief Edwin K. Clark, Dr. Okoi Arikpo, Chief Anthony Enahoro, Chief John Henry Bassey, Chief J.C. Obande, Mr. J.M. Din, Chief J.U. Uyeh, Chief S. D. Nwikpo, Chief I.I. Morphy, Mr. Tayo Akpata, Mr. Peter Vande Acka, Senator A.A. Ali, Senator David O. Dafinone, Chief I.A. Idamiebi Brown and Mr. O.G. Thompson.

When the meeting commenced, Senator Ahmadu Ali spoke on the method of voting at the convention and complained that the agenda was brought out too late. Nevertheless, he stressed the need for the group to streamline the voting system and to know the strength of the various state delegates. He said he was not sure of the number of delegates from each state and wondered whether the group was economically strong enough to make any meaningful impact.

It was at this juncture that Selcan Miner presented the voting strength of each state and read out the number of delegates from each state. He said that the preparation of agenda for the convention was the job of the National Executive Committee of the party. But he wanted contingency plans to be made and advised that the group should put its house in order. Miner further advised that the interests of the group and the various states should be identified because according to him, the convention could not go on if they were to

follow the constitution of the party or the re-organization document.

The list of delegates from the states were as follows:-

Lagos:	29
Borno:	67
Ogun:	29
Plateau:	52
Ondo:	50
Benue:	114
Oyo:	102
Gongola:	69
Kwara:	69
Cross River:	72
Niger:	68
Bendel:	74
Sokoto:	207
Imo:	76
Kaduna:	161
Anambra:	79
Kano:	113

Dr. Okoi Arikpo gave the breakdown of the accreditation cards and pointed out that there were glaring cases of irregularities in the accreditation exercise.

Governor Okilo spoke and strongly advocated that representation of elected officials should be based on successful performance at the last election and that this was the only way the party could be strengthened. In his view, there was no need to hold the convention if there were irregularities in the accreditation and other key criteria were not met.

At this juncture, Chief Tayo Akpata suggested that a small committee to work out the strategy be set up. Okilo supported this idea. And this was unanimously agreed to. But Chief Enahoro expressed some doubts as to the possibility of carrying other members in the minority states along in the game plan since, according to him, they were not involved in the deliberations. He gave the example of Cross River State that was not represented at the meeting. This was discussed by members present and it was agreed that they could carry other members identified as minorities along if they were prepared to articulate the case properly.

At the end of the meeting, a six-man committee was set up, as suggested by Akpata and Governor Okilo. Isa Odoma, the deputy Governor of Benue State, was nominated to chair the committee with Tayo Akpata, Jubril Girema, Dr. Okonny, Captain Din and Dr. Okoi Arikpo as members.

The committee was handed a three-point term of reference. These include, among other things, the reflection of accreditation based on senatorial district, examine the constitution and make recommendations and equality of representation.

The special meeting reconvened again the next day, June 27, 1980, at the Benue State House, Kaduna. There was no significant shift in those that attended the meeting. Governor Aku as Chairman and Melford Okilo of Rivers State were present. Others included Selcan Miner, Chief E. K. Clark, Dr. Okoi Arikpo, Chief J.C Obande, Chief John Henry Bassey, Hon. Ugbah Uyeh, Mr. J. M Din and Chief I.I. Morphy. The rest were Chief Tayo Akpta, Peter Vande Acka, Senator Ahmadu Ali, Senator David O. Dafinone, Chief I.A Idamiebi Brown as well as O.G Thomson.

This meeting was crucial to the group as various aspects of the constitution of the party and the re-organization document were examined thoroughly after the committee had tabled its report. Special mention was made of section 4 of the party's constitution.

It was then argued that the ratification of the three positions approved by the NEC on 1st February, 1980, could not take place. The reason was that the party secretary, who was still in office, was appointed at the time the mandate of the NEC had expired because at the 1978 convention when it became clear that a secretary could not be appointed, the convention empowered NEC to appoint an acting secretary for a period of one year. It was then agreed that there was to be a contest in November 1979.

The minority caucus group also reasoned that if NEC used its power to appoint the secretary, it was then acting under its general powers in order to avoid a vacuum in such a sensitive and highly placed office because as they put it, "it would be invidious if in a national party like the N.P.N that there should be no contest."

It was also the thinking of the group that ratifying of offices under the new re-organization documents would be illegal since according to them, the ratification of offices comes under the same provision for the election of national officers where five (5) members must come from each federal constituency.

The constitution of the defunct NPN in Section 7; 1 (a) states that it was the duty of NEC to prepare agenda for the national convention and this had not been done. It was observed that, for participation in the national convention, there was no explanation or clarification as to whether or not, the chairman and members of the boards of corporations referred to in level 4A (ix) at page 7 of the new document are in respect of federal or state boards and corporations.

Three key areas were suggested as the proposed line of action by the minority group at the special convention. These include "equal representation based on senatorial districts on the principle of equality of state and also on performance, i.e inclusion of all successful members of the legislature, both at the state and at federal levels. They also resolved to ensure that all other N.E.C members with the exception of National officers, governors and deputy governors should have their accreditation from their constituencies. Another resolution was that the system of card voting, that is block voting for each state should be introduced.

It was further agreed that a strategy for presenting the case of the minority at the convention should be worked out, including, how to get the group's new ideas across to the convention delegates. The meeting agreed that members should hold discussions with legislators from the minority states if they were to be excluded from the meeting of the 28th June and also lobby legislators and N.E.C members. A member was mandated to move the motion to include all legislators of an election at the convention the next day.

The meeting reconvened again on Saturday 28 June, 1980 at the same venue, in Kaduna. It was summoned to review the convention, the performances of the group and what the next line of action should be. Governor Aku outlined the performances and also the activities of the two day convention and then invited members present to contribute.

Former Senate President, Dr. Joseph Wayas, in his contribution, pledged his commitment to the group. He said it was the best cause for the survival of the minorities in the country and commended the efforts of the convener whom he acknowledged, believed in collective responsibility and was prepared to take directives from the group and to act on their behalf at all times at the caucus level. Chief Okilo said the minorities had suffered enough and the story of their suffering was well known to all. He reiterated his earlier

assertion that the minorities are playing a lead role in building up Nigeria and that the minorities have the power and they can use it if they are united.

One other issue Okilo touched was the issue of revenue allocation and the meeting of the three minority governors. It was his view that the sharing formula in revenue allocation was not favourable to the minorities and this must be critically addressed by government. He said that all big corporations and boards are necessary for the survival of the country, but unfortunately, the minorities have got very little of their share. To this end, Senator Dafinone urged members to take a firm stand on their rights and let others feel the impact of the activities of the group. He then suggested the principle of equality of states and quality of states. Chief Idamiebi Brown supported the theory earlier propounded by Governor Okilo of Rivers State, that is, the principle of equality and population based on performances.

Chairman of the group, Governor Aku, while summarizing the contributions made by members, appealed to members to avoid antagonism where possible and to educate the vast majority of the people so as to penetrate the grassroots. From Kaduna, the meeting was adjourned to meet again on Monday, 14th July 1980, in Gboko, to review and formalize the formula that must be 100% equality and performance. Aku and Okilo were scheduled to meet with President Shagari a few days after and brief him.

But the Gboko meeting was shelved. Rather, the group converged in Lagos at the Rivers State House, Victoria Island, on Tuesday July 15, 1980 with Melford Okilo presiding. Others at the Lagos meeting were Chief J.C Obande, Chief O. G Thompson, Hon. Edet Bassey Etienam, Hon Ugbah Uyeh, J.M Din, Senator A. Zuofa, Hon David Mtuem, Senator Victor Akan, P. Dickson, S.M Essang and Hon Simon I. Awua. Others were Chief E.K Clark, Hon L. O Okoi, Peter Vande Acka, Mr. Tayo Akpata, Dr. M. P. Okonny, Hon. Prince T.K.O. Okorotie and Dr. M.O. Offoboche.

Governor Okilo chaired this meeting because Aku was absent. A quick look at the activities of the group was briefly reviewed, particularly the Gboko and Kaduna meetings where some strategic decisions were taken that would affect the minorities positively. One thing was consistent. The leaders reminded themselves and or anyone that gets jittery about its activities that the group was not formed to gang-up against any person or group of persons. By this

time, some stakeholders in the political equation in the country began to worry about its activities. But Okilo reiterated that the organization was operating within the NPN party structure and so no one should regard its activities as anti-party.

Senator Victor Akan stressed the need for constant consultations and asked for a mandate for the group to act on behalf of the states concerned. He then urged the group to address issues, such as the creation of more states and revenue allocation. While Prince Okorotie and Etim James advised that there should be more of action and less talking. Chief O.G. Thompson reminded the group of the programme of action outlined at the Kaduna meeting and advised that there was need for N.E.C to meet urgently to take decision on clauses 17 and 18 as contained in the reorganization document.

In the general discussions that followed, other matters deserving urgent attention were listed for considerations by the group. These were: creation of states, Okigbo Revenue Allocation Report, Clauses 17 and 18, party patronage, party elective offices and party offices as well as states to be included in the group.

It was the general consensus at the meeting not to raise the issue of state creation because the party had not been consulted and that the committee set up by the party to consider the issue of states' creation had not met. On the Okigbo report, it was agreed that the report should be made available to the group, where possible and for members to study and make comments. A few days after the meeting on July 15, the Group re-assembled as a matter of urgency in Lagos on Monday 21st July, 1980 at the Rivers State House, Victoria Island. Each state was represented by five delegates.

It was at the second meeting hosted by the Rivers State governor that two other governors joined. They were Alhaji Adamu Attah of Kwara and Awwal Ibrahim of Niger State. The duo had protested to Okilo on their exclusion from the activities of the group. While Attah attended the Lagos meeting, Ibrahim only sent apologies but told Okilo who conveyed his message that he was committed to the aspirations of the group.

Apart from the governors of Kwara and Niger States, new faces were added to the growing list of membership drive for the group. They are Victor Masi, from Rivers State who was at one time Minister of Finance in the Shagari government. Other Rivers delegates included Hon. R. R. Briggs, Hon Ingo Mac Eteli, I.S. Kogbara, and

Chief N. Utah from Cross River State. Elias Nathan came from old Gongola.

In the course of deliberations, Governor Attah suggested that the group change its name to "Minority Groups" instead of "Minority States." His reason was that there were minority groups in states which were regarded as majority states. Attah's suggestion evoked a lengthy debate. One member observed that Attah had not made a categorical statement as to his commitment to the group. But Attah countered him. He told the meeting that he had actually protested to Okilo, his colleague, for excluding him from the activities of the group. He insisted that he was committed to the cause because he too was a minority man. He re-echoed Awwal Ibrahim's commitment that Niger State too was a minority state and must be taken along in the activities of the group.

On Attah's suggestion on change of name, others preferred to stick to "Minority States." The debate did not abate. Thereafter, a list of what constitutes a minority state or group was drawn up. At the end, members found a common ground and unanimously adopted "Minority States and Groups" as the name of the forum would be known.

The Lagos meeting also took the decision on how the membership of the group should look like. At the federal level, it was the consensus that membership of the group should consist of president of the senate, as it was then, senators, ministers, members of the House of Representatives, Chairmen of House Committees, who were of minority extraction. At the state level, governors and their deputies were automatic members. All chairmen of NPN across the country, who were minorities, as well as five members from NPN state's executives that were also of the minority stock. The Speakers and deputies of state Houses of Assemblies of minority states as well as all foundation members that attended the June 24, 1980 inaugural meeting of the group at the Gboko residence of Tarka. For emphasis, the meeting agreed that membership must be strictly from Minority States or Groups.

At this point, Aku addressed the gathering and told them how he had met and briefed President Shagari on the activities of the group so far. Aku also succeeded in securing a meeting date between the president and leaders of the group. It was scheduled for the following day at Ribadu Road residence of the president. By this time too, activities of the group had become a source of concern to top

members in the Shagari government, because of the way it was growing and the interest it was attracting among minorities in the country.

As a result of this, some representatives of the group were selected and handed a three-point agenda to take to the meeting with Shagari. They were asked not to take any formal stand on the issue of creation of states and that the party makes a categorical policy on the creation of states before the president commits the party. They were also to note the issue of creation of a Port-Harcourt State, which was being sponsored by persons other than the group.

In all, the question on creation of states was to be played down by the group during the meeting but to accept the general principle behind it because the president had made such promises during his electioneering campaigns. They were all to be guided by what the president was thinking before they could arrive at any decision on the matter. They had also resolved that the group study the criteria for creating states. The group was to pay particular attention to the interests of the minorities, not only in the creation of states but any other issue that minorities have more than one candidate so as to avoid conflicts. Before the meeting adjourned for the next meeting which was held in Port-Harcourt on 16 August, 1980, they agreed to raise a presidential caucus.

Meeting with President Shagari

The group had become important that it could not be ignored. As a result of this and the impact that its activities were being felt, president Shagari invited its leaders to a meeting to find out what they were up to.

Leaders that attended the meeting with the President raised very fundamental issues, which informed their resolve to stay committed to the cause of the minorities. One of it was that it became apparent for them to keep the flag of the minorities flying after the death of Tarka because of the false belief that his death would bring to an end agitations by the group, thereby making them vulnerable for other parties to infiltrate and take over.

Aku and his fellow leaders ensured that the minorities were not co-opted to gang up with the major tribes to form the Progressives Peoples Alliance, PPA. This, of course, was a plus to the fortunes of the NPN. They, however, accepted to being a pressure group but

rejected the tag of rebellion, as it was suggested to the president by some people. And before they met with the president, a few days after the meeting in Lagos, they profferred answers to questions they suspected the president would ask them. At the same time, they outlined to present to him, their aims and objectives.

When they met the president, he told them he was told that what the group wanted were positions in public offices, and because the majority tribes were ignoring the minorities. Shagari refused to buy into such propaganda. The president told the delegation that, as far as he was concerned, there was no minority and there was no majority within the context of his goverment. He reminded the group that he was never alone in his decision making as he was always consulting with the representatives of minorities before taking any decision.

By this time, some members of the majority tribes within the NPN had also fine-tuned strategies on how they would destroy the group and its aspirations. The proof of this was the misinformation about the intentions of the group which some persons had conveyed to the president.

At another meeting of the group that took place at the Benue State House of Assembly Makurdi on 30th April, 1982, members were briefed on issues discussed at previous meetings and also took turns to discuss matters arising therefrom. They also received situation reports on the chapters of the party in old Plateau and old Gongola States. The issue of the special convention of the NPN slated for late May or early June, 1982 for the nomination of presidential candidate and running mate also featured prominently in their deliberations. The meeting also discussed the issue of a national policy on the minorities based on the paper, "Minority Rights, Rotation and National Stability in Nigeria" presented by Governor Aku at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria on April 27, 1982 . The Group also took time to deliberate on the gang-up of the four political parties and how it affected the stability of the country, the NPN and the minority groups in the country.

The meeting was told that the special convention of the party would be held in the last week of May or the first week of June 1982 for the purpose of considering the nomination of the presidential candidate and his running mate. Towards this convention, both the National Working Committee and the NEC of the party were expected to meet in the second week of May.

Under the defunct NPN's constitution, only the national convention is empowered to nominate the presidential candidate of the party. The constitution provides that the National Convention shall hold once every year in November on a date to be determined by the NEC of the party.

To this end, delegates at the meeting reasoned that a special National Convention of the party may be held at any time at the request of the NEC or of two thirds of all State Executive Committees. However, it was made clear to members of the group that a Special National Convention shall meet only to discuss special matters which shall be specified in the notice summoning the convention.

Similarly, under the NPN's constitution, only the NEC was responsible for the general nationwide administration of the party and for putting into effect, the decisions of the National Convention and it is the only body that shall prepare the agenda for the National Convention. It was the understanding of the minority group that, in the emerging scenarios arising from the party's constitution, both the NWC and the National Caucus, which are responsible to the NEC, had no power to fix a date or prepare an agenda for a National Convention.

Article 26 of the defunct NPN's constitution, the party's caucus or Liaison Committee, as it was called then, shall perform the duties of liaising between the three arms of the Executive, the Legislature and the party's leadership and no more, but it appeared that the party's caucus at the national level were performing the functions of the NEC, which was charged with the responsibility for the nationwide organization of the party. Members were then invited to discuss and take a stand on the matter before the proposed NEC meeting and the special national convention.

However, the group reasoned that there were a few options available for their members, viz: To support the holding of the special convention for the following reasons:

(i) it would provide the presidential candidate sufficient time to prepare for the elections;
(ii) the party would also have enough time to settle any conflict arising there from ;
(iii) other parties would be hard pressed to come up with their presidential candidate;

The second option that was open to the group was to oppose the special convention because, having regard to the preamble to the briefings they got, it would appear to be unconstitutional to the effect that the special convention had no powers to nominate the presidential candidate. Thirdly, it was the conviction of the members of the minority group that allowing the convention would expose their presidential candidate to unrestrained political attack and ridicule and lastly, that it would give the party enough time to settle conflicting ambitions of potential candidates.

The Makurdi meeting also received briefs on previous meetings and matters arising from the meeting of August 6th, 1981 held in the Exco Chambers, Makurdi, Benue State. At that meeting, issues discussed centered on:

(i) Report of the Planning Committee by its chairman, Chief I. I. Morphy. The committee was requested to examine the possibility of identifying the distribution of patronages such as appointments, contracts and the wealth of the nation. In its report, the committee gave examples of the one-sided allocation of funds to the River Basin Authorities, appointment of Presidential Advisers, Permanent Secretaries into strategic ministries, etc. The basic conclusion was that the minorities were discriminated against in many ways. After prolonged debates on the report, the meeting agreed that a memo be prepared for presentation to Mr. President as a follow-up to the discussions held with him by the leaders of the groups in September, 1980;

(ii) The need for unity and harmony among the group was emphasized because very often the majority groups tended to divide minority elements for their own use. Unity and better understanding was stressed among members;

(iii) Some foundation members were fond of blackmailing leaders of the minority group in order to achieve selfish aims. The meeting felt that the group might be forced to expose the dubious role of such members;

(iv) A committee was appointed at a recent meeting of the National Working Committee of the NPN held at the National Theatre to look into the minority group question. At that working committee, the minority group was

criticized for organizing themselves within the party.

As part of preparations ahead of the 1983 general elections, Governors Aku and Okilo also held another special meeting with members of the Gongola State chapter of the NPN in Makurdi on 15th December, 1981. This meeting had in attendance a delegation of 13 politicians led by Mallam Sangeri Usman. Others were Paschal Bafyau, Elias Nathan, Umoru Gela among others. The objective was to examine common problems that the minority tribes within the party in the state has and to ensure that no mistakes were made in the forthcoming elections in the state. The meeting also enabled members to diagnose sources of failure in the state during the 1979 elections to ensure that success would be achieved at the next polls.

The causes of past failures were thoroughly examined and new strategies were mapped out. The issue of finance and organization were also discussed. The minorities in the old Gongola State represented about 75% of the entire population of the state but they hardly had control of the affairs of their own state, contrary to the principles of democracy, hence the intra party dispute that dominated the party in the state due to mistrust, injustice and victimization of party members by a few leaders. Some minority leaders of the party in Gongola State were suspended and most of them lost their jobs. The role of the National Secretariat on the matter was suspect in that they were accused to have taken sides.

The representatives of the minorities from Gongola were told to close their ranks and work together, hence a victory for the NPN means a victory for all of them. Aku was mandated to hold reconciliatory meetings with all the factions in both Plateau and Gongola by President Shagari. That was why he discussed the prevailing situation in two states with the national chairman of the party, Chief M.A. Akinloye, and Professor Iya Abubakar. He demanded that a fresh congress be conducted with observers from the national headquarters present.

Aku, however, told the delegation that if the NPN must win in 1983 general elections, someone outside the Fulani extraction must be nominated as the candidate. He said the same must be applied to areas where non-Fulani's lived in the selection of candidates into various positions. That the popularities of the candidates must be considered before giving them the backing for the positions they sought.

In Plateau State, the story was not much different from Gongola. The minorities were themselves at daggers drawn against one another. And with the number of the minorities in these states, Aku and Okilo, together with other comrades in the struggle, had begun strategizing to win these states over to the NPN. The NPP was in power in Plateau State while the GNPP held sway in old Gongola State. And to achieve this task, Governor Okilo gave Aku all the moral support to realize this. The mission was to win all elections including the local government elections that were conducted shortly after.

Giving the strategic importance of Gongola and Plateau to the cause of the minorities, the Benue and Rivers States governors took up the responsibility to take care of and make sure that the NPN structures in Plateau and Gongola States were well positioned with trusted minority leaders in place so that the party could take off properly in those states ahead of the 1983 general elections because they considered it crucial to the position of the minorities.

At the meeting with Plateau delegates, Ibrahim Mantu and Silas Janfa spoke passionately on the need to take the party away, not just from the control of NPP leadership but much more from leaders within the NPN fold, whom they accused had hijacked it and erecting factions. The duo complained of lack of support from outside the state since no help seemed to be coming from leaders of the party from within. There was an instance when some persons physically assaulted Abdullahi Adamu at a rally in Port-Harcourt because of a particular faction he belonged to.

To that extent, they were ill-equipped to engage the likes of John Jatau Kadia and Ishaku Ibrahim, who were known formidable political forces and backed by the national leadership of the party. Aku then sought to know what Kadiya's ambition was. He was told that Kadiya was seeking the governorship seat of the state on the platform of the NPN.

When Silas Janfa spoke at the meeting, he emphasized that the Plateau issue was one that must be dealt with aggressively. He requested Aku and other leaders of the group in the party to intervene on their behalf and communicate their plight to the headquarters of the party in Lagos "in the language that they will understand us, otherwise, we have been doing all we can without fruitful result."

Specifically, Janfa accused the former NPN national secretary,

Suleiman Takuma, for being responsible for the factional Akwanga congress of the party which brought the confusion in the Plateau state chapter of the party. Even though a letter was sent from the national headquarters of the party through one Chief Anyanwu from Lagos to stop the Akwanga congress, it never did since the brains behind it were working for some very powerful and vested interests ahead of the 1983 general elections.

In the case of Plateau, Aku told Mantu and Janfa to divorce any links with anything mythical on Kaduna mafia, whether real or imagined. The Plateau delegates were asked to make their stand clear for the President to understand them and be convinced to work with them. They were directed to address a press conference and dissociate themselves and denounce any connection, if any, they had with the Kaduna Mafia to gain the Presidents' confidence. All this was to take place before 7 January 1982. It was the thinking of Aku and Okilo that if this was done, it will block any channel of blackmail anyone may want to pose against the other faction of the party.

Mantu and Janfa were further asked to consult with Adamu Ciroma constantly, as well as the national secretary of the party, Suleiman Takuma, and Simon Shango, the national publicity secretary, so that no one turns to use them against their interest. He said it was only when the President understands this that he will be convinced that they were capable of organizing the party in Plateau State. The NPN chairman in Plateau State, Alhaji Saleh Hassan, was accused of violating the agreement reached in Lagos to resolve the crises of leadership in the party in the state.

But things got to a head when five local governments of lower Plateau petitioned the former National Chairman, Adisa Akinloye, over what they alleged as 'lopsided sharing of posts' in the State. The local government areas were Awe, Akwanga, Lafia, Nasarawa and Keffi. In the petition, the chairmen demanded that the executive committee of the party in the state be dissolved to make way for a fresh election.

They also accused Prince Alade Lamuye, who was sent by the national headquarters of the party as chairman of the nomination committee, for allowing the state chairman of the party, Saleh Hassan, to continue in office even when it was clear that both the party chairman and the governorship candidate, John Kadiya, were all from the same area.

The petition reads in part: "We do not contest the results of the congress despite some obvious abuses in the election and the unorthodox approach adopted in the election but what we are concerned with is the fate of the party under the present circumstances."

All they wanted was for the national chairman of the party to realize that, if the decision of the panel to allow Hassan was not reversed and the zoning principle not strictly complied with, they were certain that the party would not fare better in the 1983 general elections. Of course the party went into the 1983 polls divided, which again paved the way for Chief Solomon Lar to be re-elected for a second term.

On March 17, 1982, a meeting of the parliamentary caucus of the Minority Group was held in the residence of the Senate President, Dr. Joseph Wayas. Chief Edwin Clark presided over this meeting. They discussed, among other things, the political developments in the country vis-à-vis the formation of PPA. The meeting analyzed the extent to which such developments affect the NPN and particularly the minority group.

Discussions centred around the need for unity among the minorities generally and the finances to promote the activities of the group. A finance committee was set up to raise funds to further the activities of the group. It was also decided that a National Assembly group be set up to meet periodically to discuss issues, as they affected the interests of the minorities in and outside the Assembly.

This parliamentary group was to liaise closely with the national body of the group. Senator Abogede was elected Chairman and Dr. Sowho was elected the Secretary, while Senate President Dr. Joseph Wayas was elected the over-all leader of the parliamentary group. This meeting also decided that membership of the minority group should be defined by ethnic groupings and by state.

And as the 1983 elections got underway, leaders of the minorities were strategizing to play a key role in the next government. Some said the minorities were gunning for the vice-presidency slot. They had begun mounting pressure on President Shehu Shagari to appoint his running mate within their fold. Of course, it was evident that the Igbos who occupied the position through Dr. Alex Ekwueme would not give up easily. And they sure worked hard to rebuff the onslaught from the minorities.

Proponents of this project had their mind on Cyrus Nunieh, a Senator from Rivers State. The Rivers State branch of the party had written series of letters to President Shagari and NPN chairman, Chief Adisa Akinloye. They had argued that it was time one of their own should be appointed as vice-president. This, according to them, was because the minority areas cast the highest number of votes for President Shagari during 1979 elections.

In a bid to strengthen their argument, a form of blackmail was introduced into the pursuit of the vice presidency project. They tried to convince the national secretariat of the party that if the vice-president did not come from the minority areas, there was the likelihood for the NPN to lose in those areas in the 1983 elections.

The minority leaders were convinced that their pressure on the president was not out of place. And they resolved to push more. This, they reasoned, was because after scoring the highest votes for the party in the 1979 polls, they were not considered for vital posts in the executive arm of the Federal Government. Agitations from the minorities became a source of worry to the leaders of the party. The NPN national headquarters in Lagos even admitted that some party stalwarts had already bought the idea from the minorities and promised to raise it prominently in the next national convention of the party.

Nunieh's proposed candidature for the post of vice-presidency was beginning to gain currency among stalwarts in nearly all NPN controlled states. Whether he received an overwhelming support across all the party leaders from the minority states, it was not clear but they were said to have endorsed him. Representatives from Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, Kaduna, Niger, Rivers and Cross River, including Benue States, were said to have supported Senator Nunieh.

Senator Nunieh's nomination was seen as appropriate. This was not just because he was from the minority but also because, as a lawyer, he was one of the legal minds that stood firmly in defense of the President during Chief Awolowo election petition in 1979. At the end, however, the president used his prerogative and retained Ekwueme as his running mate in the 1983 general elections.

Chapter

10

Theory of the 4th Force

On April 27, 1982, Governor Aku presented a paper at the Institute of Administration, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria titled: "Minority Rights, Rotation and National Stability in Nigeria". This paper, which became a working document for the political at the Gen. Sani Abacha Constitutional Conference of 1994/95, shaped the discourse on the place of the minorities in Nigerian politics. Ostensibly, he had taken over from where his godfather, Tarka, stopped.

Obviously, as a crusader and champion of minority rights, Aku envisaged that his pet project (Theory of the Fourth Force), would bring the minorities together so that they can crystallize their positions in the context of Nigerian politics and therefore "create the fourth force which will help to improve the economic condition, political and social conditions of the minorities. All this can only be achieved if minorities realized the need to come together." He was clear in his thinking that the three main major groups viz: Hausa/Fulani, Ibo and Yoruba were fully recognized.

Even when it was speculated that he was propping up the minority platform to realize his ambition to contest for the presidency in future, Aku dismissed, insisting that minorities should not be used by anyone for the purpose of achieving an ambition that is not genuine. He maintained that "anything that I do and I hope to do as regards minorities is not just for the interest of

minorities. It is for the interest and unity of everybody in this country. Minorities in the times of crisis in this country have always been a stabilizing force. This must be recognized during peace times too." Dr. Yima Sen, Aku's former Director of Information, noted in his preface to the lecture that attracted more enemies from the northern oligarchy. It raised the hopes among the minority groupings over their suppression by the majority tribes. Sen observed that:

> One of the main problems of African development has arisen from a colonial history which led to the formation of arbitrarily carved nation-states. In the case of the Nigerian nation, British colonial activity put together various ethno-linguistic, religio-political and socio-economic units to form what is today the most largely populated Black Country. Given the global position of African peoples, which is at the bottom of all of human society, the onus of leadership for redemption falls on Nigeria largely due to her human and natural resources.
>
> Since all human endeavour starts at the primary and domestic level, after undergoing spiritual re-awakening, the spirit and primary concern of the foregoing text is about ultimately achieving egalitarianism and equitable appropriation of resources, benefits and entitlements.
>
> The reality of the Nigerian situation is that the nature of pluralism that has resulted from British colonial activity put together small and large ethnic units. Immediately after independence, political hegemony in a trichotomous regional system resided with the Ibos of the East, the Yorubas of the West and the Hausa-Fulani of the North.
>
> Fierce and sometimes sanguinary, political struggles by "minority" elements outside the big three led to a process of states creation which has left Nigeria with 19 states today. Nigeria's political problems, however, remains unsolved.
>
> From, the perception of Governor Aper Aku of Benue, a new Zoning and Rotating system can ensure that all Nigerian groups have a chance of occupying the highest seat in the polity, the Presidency.

Maybe the President's seat is so important because of the powers available to a president under Nigeria's new Constitution. Also, it could be that since the political state occupies such an important position vis-a-vis the civil society and the economic sphere in most developing or periphery countries, the Governor's concern is justified.

Governor Aku's ideas should be viewed as those of an experienced political actor's contribution to the national growth of Nigeria. The ideas should not be seen as finite or conclusive, rather they should be seen as capable of opening new vistas to all genuine and patriotic approaches towards solving Nigeria's problems of nationhood.

Above all, the ideas should be seen as a positive and realistic step towards domestically and politically strengthening Nigeria for the enormous task of African leadership, which has become an imperative and a responsibility.

Zoning and Political Stability

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Senators, Hon. Commissioners, Hon. Members of Houses of Representatives and Assembly, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

It gives me a great pleasure to be here to address you on an aspect of problems of political stability and the future of the Second Republic. As the Director of the Institute of Administration, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, pointed out in his letter of invitation, the rapidity of social, political and economic change, coupled with the harsh realities of our political and economic system have combined to make political stability a fragile commodity in contemporary developing nations, Nigeria not exempted. The relevance and importance of this conference and similar others that this famous Institute has organized in the past cannot be over-emphasized.

There has been much talk about the unwillingness of the universities to identify themselves with the problems and aspirations of its environment. By organizing such activities, the Ahmadu Bello University is responding to the demands of its environment. This is the right effort in the right direction. I would like to urge other institutions to emulate this example. Universities and institutes of

higher education should mirror the social and technological aspirations of its environment.

There is a joke about a man who went for a brain transplant and was offered the choice of two brains – a Professor's for ₦100.00 and a politician's for ₦10, 000. 00.

"Does that mean that the politician's brain is much better than the Professor's?" asked the man.

"Not exactly," replied the brain transplant salesman, "the Politician's has never been used."

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, if the politicians of this country have not used their brains in analyzing problems of political stability and our future survival, it is at least comforting to realize that bodies such as the one we have here made up of disciplined brains of this country and assisted by well-wishers from academic communities in other parts of the world are dedicated to that cause.

Political stability and the processes, activities and institutions that are undertaken or created to enhance that stability are more likely to achieve success if they are generally accepted by the majority of the society. The preference shown for the presidential system of government over other systems during Constituent Assembly deliberations can be regarded as a clear demonstration of the acceptability of the presidency as an institution potentially capable of fostering national integration and national stability.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to make suggestions towards the formulation of a public policy on the presidency and zoning system as a deliberate effort to ensure access to that powerful position by all sections of this country as a means to achieving long-term politics in Nigeria. In particular it has been assumed that, without a nationally developed and accepted zoning system, the presidency would continue to elude minorities in Nigeria and it is felt that the situation will not augur well for the political stability of Nigeria. In discussing the presidency, minorities and national stability, one could mean several things. It could mean the articulation of the position of the president and the exercise of his constitutional powers for the benefit of all sections including the minority groups in a manner that generates confidence and thus fosters national stability. In this paper, we are looking at the presidency, minorities and national stability in a somewhat different angle. We shall consider a possible national policy designed to ensure equality in accessibility to the position of the president in Nigeria by

both majority groups and minorities. The aim of such policy would be to zone or group majority and minority tribes in Nigeria and constitutionally guarantee them a turn in providing a president for Nigeria.

I suppose most people here would not need to be told who is a minority and who the majority is. In our discussion, we shall consider the majority groups as those ethnic groups within Nigeria whose distinctive culture is established as superior in the society, and which treat differentially or unequally other groups in the society with other cultures in order to maximize its own group interests. We shall consider minorities as those who are subordinate segments of the Nigerian society. They are many in number as a whole but suffer the disadvantage of not being similar in culture or language. They, however, have one thing in common. They are self-conscious units aware of their backwardness vis-a-vis majority groups in Nigeria. In Nigeria, there are three well-known majorities — the Hausa/Fulani group, the Yorubas and the Ibos. The minorities as a group are those that do not belong to these three well-known majorities.

Why do we Need A Public Policy on the Presidency and Minorities?

At all levels, public policy comes as a result of political conflict and it is the major output of any political system. Public policy causes feedback and serves as a focus for debate and new demands, and it is an important input into the political system. A policy, if well developed, has the potential of having a deep impact on public welfare, on the distribution of goods, services and power among groups. Such a policy can also have impact on the functioning of the economic system, political processes, social relations, and on the support and stability of the political system.

If governments and societies stand to gain so much from well articulated and accepted public policies, then it would perhaps be right to say that a national policy on minorities is long overdue. I say long overdue because minorities have always been recognized as indispensable by all the majority tribes that we have earlier referred to. Majority groups in Nigeria have always sought and often obtained the support of minorities to gain political power. However, soon after getting what they want, the majority groups turn a complete blind eye to the position, predicament, yearnings,

reasonable and legitimate aspirations of the minorities that contributed in putting them there in the first place.

Since the development of public policy implies "purposive course of action" by government actors "in dealing with problems or matters of public concern," and given the implicit recognition of the importance of minorities in Nigeria, the time has come for a policy on minorities and power sharing. Without minorities the NPN would have found it difficult to win the Presidency in 1979. On the other hand, if the minorities had given their support to Chief Obafemi Awolowo, he would probably have been the president. This is a current simple illustration of the importance of minorities in Nigeria. A public policy on minorities will therefore define common problems, the means to solve them and the ends to be achieved by the policy.

Perhaps the most important reason for a policy on ethnic minorities and the presidency is the objective of this august conference. This is to ensure the survival, stability and the future of the Second Republic. There has been so much anxiety based on who will control this country. This anxiety was responsible for the collapse of the First Republic and the unfortunate war that cost us a lot of lives and considerable loss of property. The military tried to do a lot that was supposed to go a long way in allaying the fears and anxieties of the minorities. The creation of states was expected to solve that problem.

The creation of states has however been accepted, as of now, as a right so much that the majority tribes are scrambling for states more than minorities. As a result, the gains that may have been made by minorities who got their states have been lost again to majority tribes.

To a large extent, the Nigerian Constitution has saved minorities a lot of trouble by its requirement for the reflection of Federal character in political appointments. Section 135 of the Constitution which provides for the reflection of federal character is the basis for the national policy on minorities. This policy should now occupy the attention of every well-meaning Nigerian. Federal character should be reflected in all appointments especially the nomination and election of the President of the Federal Republic. Obviously, only one person can be the President of the Republic at any one time. Federal character can therefore be reflected only over a period of time. Looked at in this sense, such a policy is not only in the

interest of minorities but all the other groups in the country who have demonstrated apprehension over succession of leadership of Nigeria since independence.

One would have expected that the grouping of minorities of Nigeria with majority tribes in the defunct Western Region, Eastern Region and Northern Region would lead to acculturation resulting in clear political working arrangements that adequately protected the interests of all concerned. This, however, did not happen largely due to unwillingness on the part of majority tribes to make any reasonable concessions. Having come this far and taking into full account all our political and social development, it would appear more sensible for minorities to come together and form a fourth force. This we expect to happen with the co-operation of all concerned with political stability of the country— majorities and minorities alike. There is a growing feeling that zoning can rescue minorities from their political obscurity and at the same time, guarantee majority interests, foster national stability and ensure the success of the Second Republic.

I agree with Alhaji Maitama Sule who reportedly said recently, "It is this idea that Nigeria does not belong to any particular tribe and group of people that became part of the reasons for the introduction of the zoning system by the NPN, the system which gives all the tribal groups in the country the opportunity to present a presidential candidate for the country when it is their turn to do so." (MAITAMA SULE TWISTS THE MEANING OF NPN ZONING SYSTEM, *Sunday Concord, April 25, 1982*).

Majority ethnic groups have shown that they cannot come together to form one formidable party to work together for the progress and stability of this country. You take the three main parties in Nigeria and you can readily identify them with one ethnic group or the other, the UPN is predominantly Yoruba. The NPP is, without apology, essentially an Ibo political union. Even the NPN which is the most national of all the parties cannot easily escape this identification with majority ethnic groups. The dominance in the NPN clearly goes to the Hausa/Fulani group. Because of the predominance of majority tribes in these major parties through which the governance of this country is done, minorities in them continually feel a sense of insecurity. Politics, being a game of numbers, majority wishes and aspirations in all these major political parties ride over those of minorities. This does not make for political

stability and the survival of the Second Republic. As both majority tribes and minorities alike have so much stake in the political stability and survival of the Second Republic, wouldn't we be doing a great national service to Nigeria and posterity by initiating appropriate political changes to ensure stability and our survival?

Zoning Can Ensure National Stability

The zoning system which the NPN has openly promoted and which other parties practise but refuse to openly acknowledge has the potential to allay minority fears in Nigeria and promote national stability. I make bold to suggest that the zoning system should be studied, evaluated, improved and enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. When this is to be done, the Constitution should spell out the national zones and make it mandatory for all parties in the country to adopt its provision in the administration of political patronage for all political appointments, especially the Presidency.

One is not suggesting that the zoning system, as practised by the NPN, is ideal. What is being implied is that zoning as a concept and practice of political administration is a potentially healthy practice in Nigeria. Ideally, there should be about six zones in Nigeria — three in the southern states and three in the northern states. The demarcation in the south can easily be done in a manner that puts all Yorubas, including the Kwara Yorubas in one zone, the Ibos, including those in Bendel State in one zone and all minorities in another. There could also be three zones in the northern states.

Based on this analysis, I wish to suggest two major polities on zoning that are in effect policies for minority interests and national stability.

1. There should exist a constitutional mandate for zoning especially for the office of the president. Eight years should be allocated to one particular zone, which guarantees a second term for any good President deserving it.
2. All aspirants for the presidency in all political parties should come from one zone, whose turn it is to provide the president. All political parties should field candidates from that zone. Tribal reflection of candidates will lose effect since all will come from one zone. The fear of perpetual succession by one ethnic group will disappear.

> This practice will promote ideological and party affiliations, thus promoting national stability.

Zoning, in this sense, does not tally with geographical demarcations as in the case of the current zoning system practised by the NPN. If this idea is studied and modified for inclusion in our Constitution, the beginning of the end of anxiety among big tribes and minorities would have come. In the zoning system suggested, it is possible that minorities may have two out of six suggested zones. This would give them 33.33% chance of producing a President. Minorities, it has been suggested, make for 51% of the country's population — a paradoxical majority. So, for them to have two out of six zones is probably reasonable. This policy will enhance the stability and survival of the Second Republic because anxiety will be largely lessened. Struggles among big tribes will also probably lessen.

This suggested policy on minorities, the presidency and national stability is made in full awareness of the short-term anxieties that the change will cause among majority circles. Between short-term anxieties and perpetual anxieties, which lack of concrete policy now causes, the former is to be preferred.

Ethnic politics is essentially a movement for change. All change usually brings anxiety. According to Marden and Mayer, groups whose entrenchment or whose gains are being challenged will be doubly anxious. There is the risk that hostility will be the response, and that ethnic consciousness can get trapped in the negativism of symbolically preserved focus on past injustices. The development of an ethnic minority policy, it is hoped, will rather contribute creative innovation to the political process with defined long-term goals and carefully considered strategies.

The voice of minority Nigerians is proof that they are deeply and actively part of Nigerian life. Their assumptions are Nigerian assumptions, for good or ill, and their creativity is at Nigeria's disposal. The creation of a stable and dynamic Second Republic that is religiously pluralistic has largely been achieved. Whether a similar feat can be created in the political sphere depends on how much real respect and trust can be engendered, and on fair and equal access to opportunities that the Nigerian society offers. The stability and future of Nigeria should no longer lie in the hands of majority tribes alone but in the hands of all who may cherish to transcend their own communities, be they minorities or majorities.

Zoning and Rotation of the Presidency

You may probably recall that on 27th April, 1982, I presented a paper on the stability of the Second Republic with emphasis on zoning and minorities at the Institute of Administration, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

In the paper, I suggested that the instability of this nation is partly caused by the uncertainty in the minds of its constituent ethnic groups as to whether they can ever become elected President of this country. I suggested that, in order to allay these fears, the country should be divided into Six Zones, three from the South and three from the North. In the South, I suggested that the three zones should be identified as:

1. Ibo Zone, including the Ibos from Bendel State.
2. Yoruba Zone, including the Yorubas from Kwara State.
3. The Minority Zone, including all minorities from the South.

I did not suggest then how the three zones from the North should be defined.

Furthermore, I suggested that Presidency should be made to rotate swinging North and South and following an accepted order until all Zones are given the opportunity to provide a President for this country. I also suggested that two terms of eight years should be allocated to each zone.

Most of the national dailies carried this paper and many produced the whole text of the paper. From my observations, this paper has been received by the people of this country with cautious comments. I wish to say here, categorically, that it has been presented to the nation without any selfish ambition, and while it was presented with a strong minority background, the main substance, geared to a long-term solution of our problem of ethnic suspicion and instability, is aimed at the satisfaction of the majorities and minorities alike.

In his criticism, Chief Alhaji M. K.O Abiola is quoted to have said that I did not recommend more than one Zone in the North, but recommended three in the South. This is not true. If I did not recommend more zones in the North, I could not have said six zones for the country with three in the South. He also thought that zones should simply be two, North and South. My view is that, that will

continue to negate the issue. If you lump the Ibos, Yorubas and the minorities in one zone, then the conflict and anxieties of the groups will remain strong and the solution would elude us. Similarly, if you lump the Hausa/ Fulani together with other minorities in the North, the conflict will continue. More so, when more and more groups are now identifying themselves in the north ethnically as opposed to the yesteryears when they were prepared to be called Hausa/Fulani simply because they happened to be Muslims. In other words, religious politics has been highly de-emphasized in the North, while ethnic identity has become more pronounced. I wish to add that it is healthy for this nation to de-emphasize religious politics, but it is dangerous to emphasize ethnic politics. One way of discouraging ethnic politics, therefore, is to create a sense of confidence and hope for the future for all Nigerians. Zoning and rotating the presidency, perhaps more than any other factor, provides the answer both for the large and small ethnic groups of this nation.

Let me attempt to define the North into three Zones. As I did in the case of the South, the present State boundaries should not necessarily be used. I therefore suggest as follows:

1. Hausa/Fulani Zone — Sokoto, Kano and Kaduna (less Southern Zaria).
2. Bauchi, Borno and parts of Gongola (yet to be identified).
3. Plateau, Benue, Niger, Southern Zaria, Kwara (less Yoruba area) and Gongola (less areas to be included in Zone 2 above).

As you can see, it is not very easy to identify these zones in the north. I have to make it clear that this tentative identification is open to debate and adjustments acceptable to the generality of the people affected. For clear reference, let me arrange and number these six zones as shown below:

Zone 1 - Sokoto, Kano and Kaduna (less Southern Zaria)
Zone 2 - Borno, Bauchi and parts of Gongola
Zone 3 - Plateau, Benue, Niger and parts of Gongola, Kwara and Kaduna
Zone 4 - Imo and Anambra and parts of Bendel State
Zone 5 - Cross River, Rivers and Bendel (less Ibo speaking areas)
Zone 6 - Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo and Yoruba speaking areas of Kwara.

If this view of zoning and rotation is accepted and if the attempt I have made to identify the Zones is debated and finally resolved, we shall naturally be faced with the question of the order of rotation. This is where I would like to see our politicians exhibit their spirit of sacrifices and selflessness in the true interest of stability for this nation.

Before we come to the question of the order of rotation, I would like us to consider the question of the terms of office as provided in the Constitution. I am of the view that when considering the change of our Constitution to accommodate zoning and rotation, we should also consider the duration of one term of office and whether each zone can be constitutionally allowed only one term of office. My view is that if we allow two terms of four years each for a zone and a new president is elected during the second and final term for a zone, such president could insist on his personal rights for a second chance, while in fact that would be the final chance for the zone. I suggest, therefore, that while considering the change to accommodate zones and rotation, the right to seek election should be amended and restricted to only one. The term should, however, be increased from four years to six years. This should be long enough for any government to implement its main election pledges.

More importantly for this topic, each zone will then have one term of six years and the presidency would rotate to another zone.

How about the order of rotation that will be viewed selflessly as most fair for the generality of this nation? We can attempt that by reading into the recent history to summarize it zone by zone with dates. As a tip off from there, we shall be in a better position to say how we should rotate.

Zone 2
1960-January 15, 1966: Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (parliamentary Democracy - Head of Government - Prime Minister)

Zone 4
January 15 - January 29, 1966: General Ironsi - Military Regime - Head of State.

Zone 3
July 29, 1966 - July 29, 2975: General Gowon (Military

Regime - Head of State)

Zone1
July 29, 1975 - February 13, 1976: General Murtala Mohammed (Military Regime - Head of State)

Zone 6
February 13, 1976 - October 1, 1979: General Obasanjo (Military Regime - Head of State)
October 1, 1979 -1983: Alhaji Shehu Shagari, First Elected Executive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

I would like to suggest, at this point, and also in complete agreement with Chief Abiola, that the basic rotation order of the president should be between the North and the South. The historical summary that I have made should guide us as to how to rotate internally wherever the presidency moves.

Another area of criticism that my paper received was in connection with the fate of minorities within a state. I consider zoning as the solution here too. I wish to say that in Benue State, Four zones have been identified based on population and ethnic groups. Based on the Local Government Areas, as included in the Constitution, the zones are as follows:

1. Western Zone - Idah, Dekina, Ankpa and Bassa (Igala mainly, 15 members to the State House of Assembly)
2. Mid-Western Zone - Okpokwu, Otukpo and Oju (mainly Idoma, return 12 members to the State House of Assembly)
3. North-Central Zone - Gwer, Makurdi and Gboko (mainly Tiv, returned 14 members to the State House of Assembly)
4. Eastern Zone - Vandeikya, Kwande and Katsina-Ala (mainly Tiv, return 16 members to the State House of Assembly)

The number of members returned to the House by each zone reflects the relative size of each zone. Because of their population, the Tivs have two zones. It is my wish that if that State is going to be intact, power should rotate within these zones, particularly the Governorship, just as I would like to see the Presidency rotate within the six zones of the country. Only this can guarantee the governorship

in Benue State to all areas particularly so as the Tivs form more than one half of that state population. You can see there is in fact no selfish design in this exercise. In fact, I would like to see this system introduced in all the states of the federation as a fair means of sharing power and amenities.

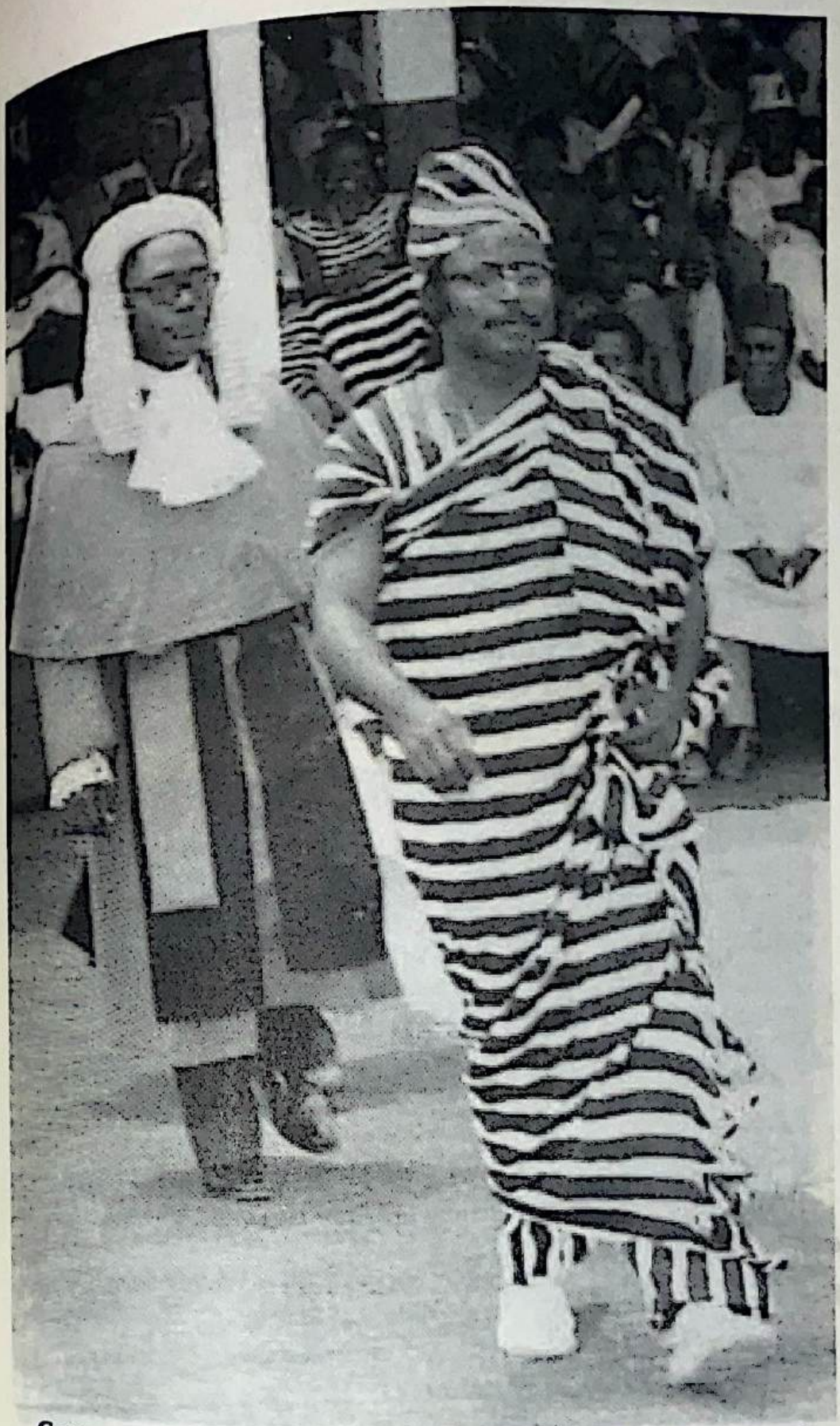
Towards A Lasting Stability

One of the most important demands that have cut across the whole breadth of the country since the inception of the civilian administration is that for the creation of more states. The true motives behind these demands are sometimes quite difficult to understand.

It is generally believed that there were not sufficient consultations before the creation of states in 1975. The good work of the military regime had two main effects. Generally speaking, everybody was happy with the military for accepting the concept of creation of more states in the country and creating it in the absence of political wrangling. On the other hand, some people are of the opinion that a few top military officers of that time partitioned certain areas in order to suit their personal ends. But as I said earlier, generally, the last exercise by the army was very much welcome.

In my view, boundary adjustment should, therefore, be a greater issue rather than creation of so many more states as is now being demanded. I am NOT opposed to creation of a few more states. It is necessary to create a few more states in order to at least get a figure that will make it easier to answer to everybody's satisfaction this question – What is two-thirds of the states in Nigeria? To that end I suggest that when Abuja becomes a state, we will accept that we have twenty (20) states. I suggest, therefore, that we should create only four (4) more states in this country bringing the total to twenty-four (24). For a president to win in any election, therefore, he would need to win not less than 25% of votes in at least 18 states.

I think one of the motives behind creation of more states was that which originated from the minority ethnic groups. They resented their grouping with large ethnic groups, who they feared looked only after their large ethnic group interest. They could not see how they could ever head the administration in such areas. There were clear examples of this fear of minority groups from the Northern



Governor Aper Aku stepping out to take charge of Benue in 1979. Justice James Adesuyin follows closely.

Justice Adesuyin administering the Oath of Allegiance on Governor Aper Aku.

Governor Aper Aku signs the Oath of Allegiance before Justice Adesuyin.

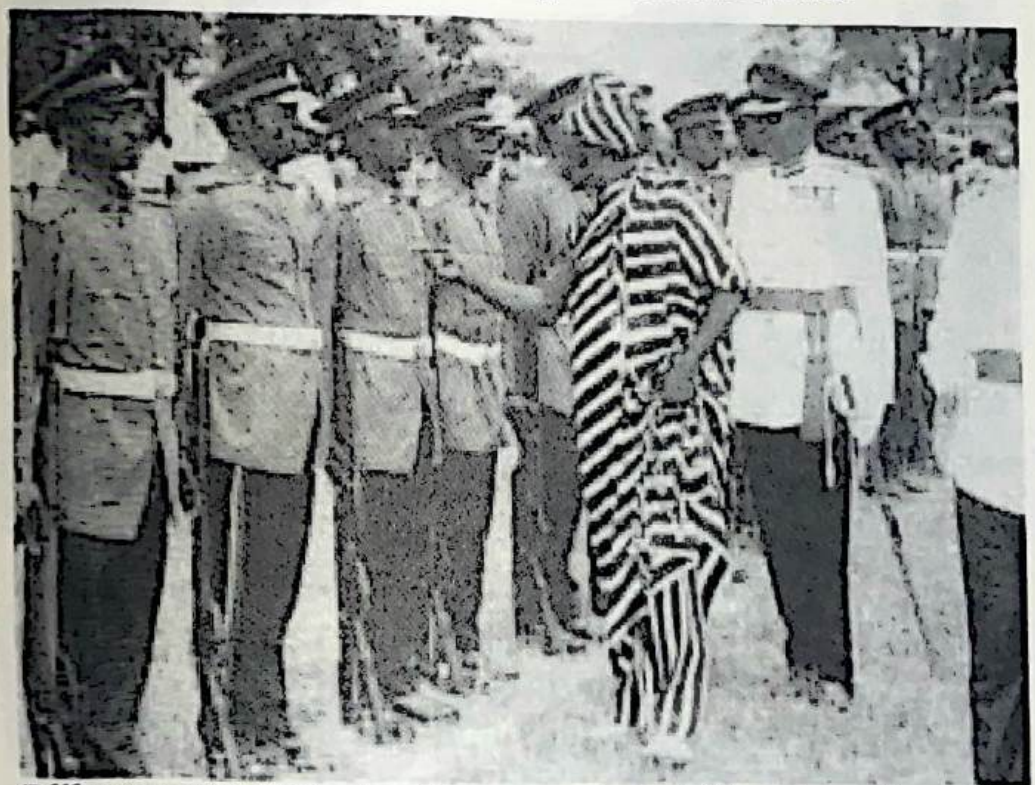
Outgoing Military Administrator Group Capt Bayo Lawal congratulating Governor Aper Aku shortly after the swearing-in.

Outgoing Military Administrator Group Capt Bayo Lawal in a hearty chat with Governor Aper Aku shortly after the swearing-in. On the right is Mrs Mbateren Aku.

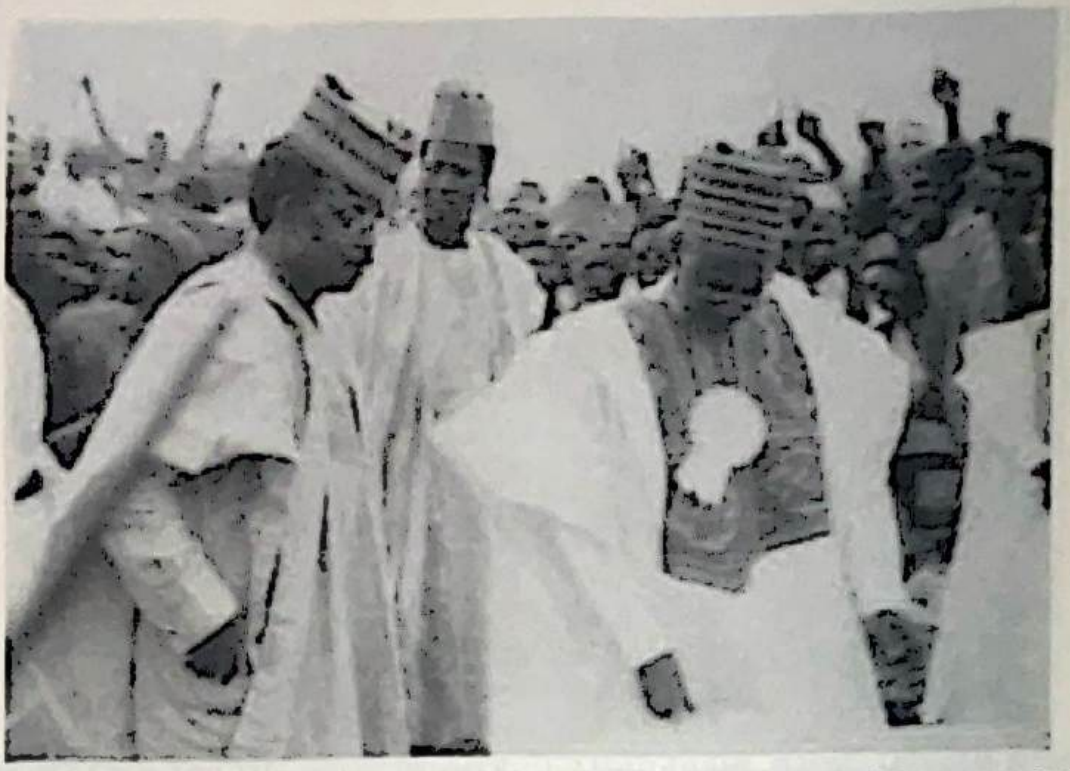
(L-R) Late Tor Tiv, Akperan Orshi; Attah Igala, Aliyu Obaje and Och'Doma, Abraham 'Ajene Okpabi at the swearing-in ceremony of Aku on October 1, 1979.

Former Chief Judge of Benue State, Justice James Adesuyin and the outgoing Military Administrator Group Capt Bayo Lawal sharing a joke at the swearing-in ceremony.

After the Swearing-In 1979: (L-R) Former Commissioner of Police, Isa Odoma, Deputy Governor, Gov. Aku, Group Capt. Bayo Lawal, (outgoing Military Administrator) Ignatius Nomhwange and former SMG.



'I like your Medal': Gov. Aku seems to be telling the police officer as he inspects the Guard of Honour after his Oath of office in 1979.

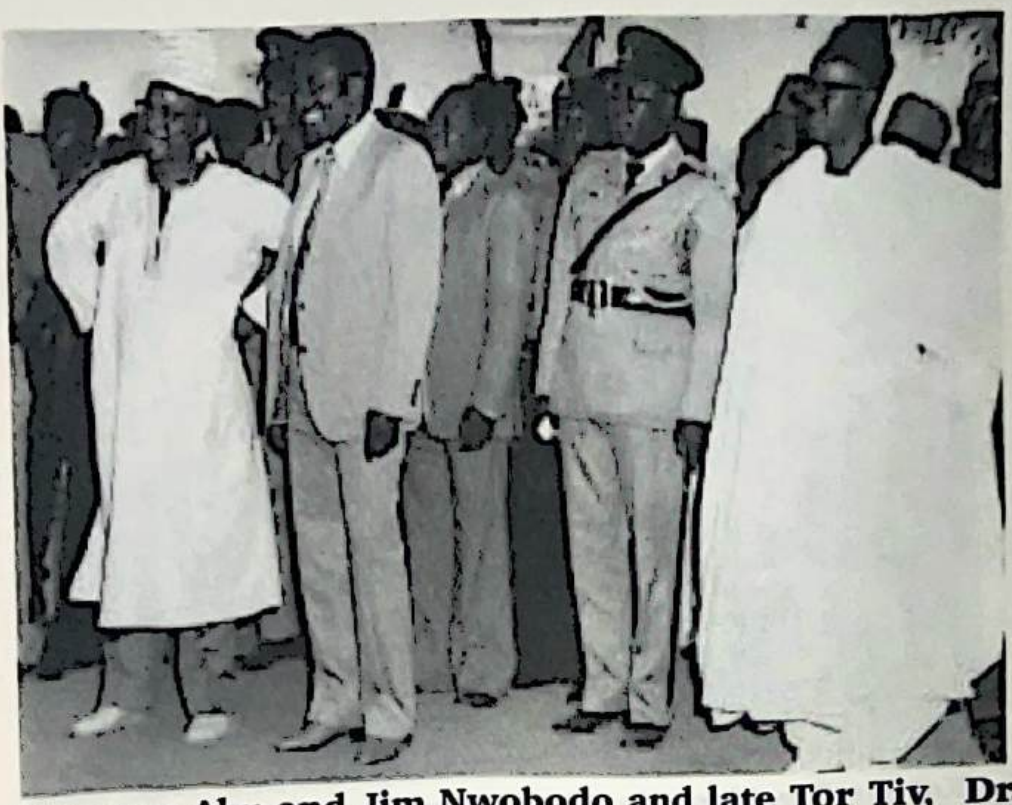


Governor Aku and President Shagari when the president paid a state visit to Benue.

Governor Aku and Alh. Awwal Ibrahim former Gov. of old Niger State.

The Korean President Chun Doo Hwan and Governor Aku take the salute as National Anthems are being played.

The Korean President Chun Doo Hwan signs the visitors book while Governor Aku watches.



Governor Aku and Jim Nwobodo and late Tor Tiv, Dr. Akperan Orshi, being entertained by a cultural Group

Mr. Athanasius Angereke, Dr Orban Nyiakura, Mvendaga Jibo and other cabinet members at the Makurdi Airport awaiting the arrival of Gov. Aku.

Gov. Aku and some guests at a dinner party.

Hon. Ugbah Uyeh and former Speaker House of Representatives, Hon. Peter Vande Acka at a dinner party.

Gov. Aku and former President Shehu Shagari at a public function.

Gov. Aku introducing Hon. Ugbah Uyeh to Dr Clement Isong, former Gov. of old Cross River State.

Gov. Aku and his two wives at a function. To the left is Mbateren (first wife) on the right is Mrs. Victoria Aku.

Gov. Aku and his wife, Victoria arriving at a function.

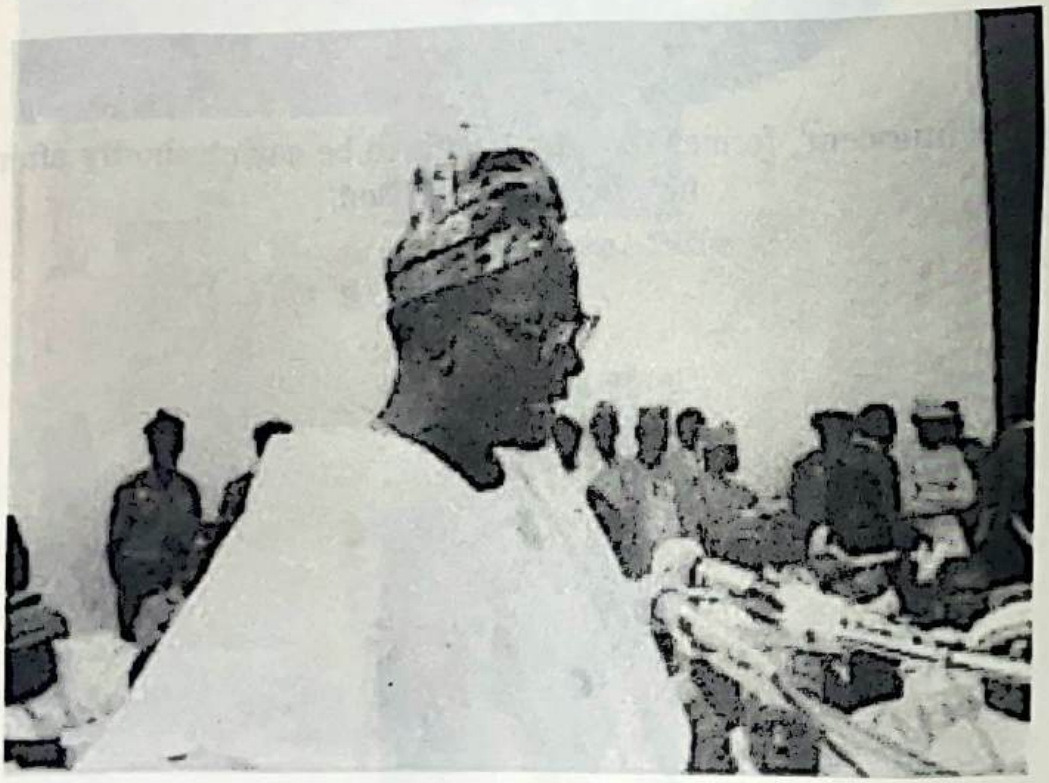
Mama Ityongona,
Aper's Mother.

Mrs. Mbateren, Wife.

Akua Aku, First Son.

'I am innocent', former Gov. Aku seems to be saying shortly after his release from prison.

Gov. Aku and NPN big wigs at Gboko '83 rally.



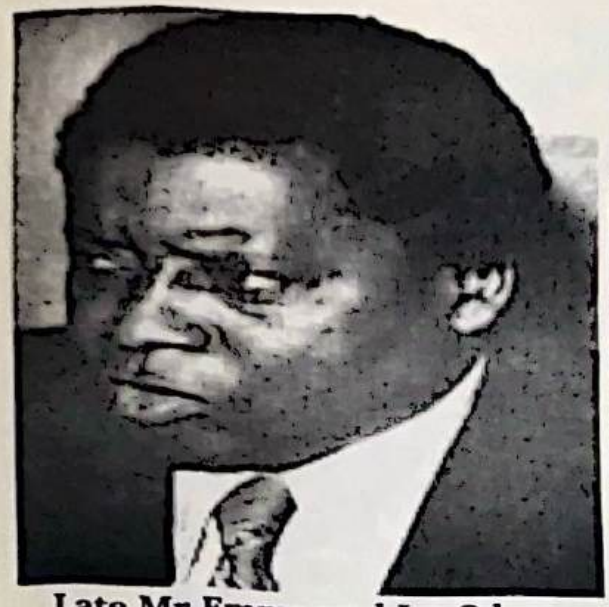
Former NPN National Chairman, Chief Adisa Akinloye, addressing NPN supporters at Gboko 83 rally.

Former National Chairman of the defunct NPN, Chief Adisa Akinloye, Former Senate President, Dr Joseph Wayas, Alhaji Umaru Dikko and others at Gboko 83 re-election rally.

Gov. Jim Nwobodo of old Anambra State being introduced to Benue State cabinet members by Gov. Aku.

Gov. Aku being decorated with a traditional regalia by a traditional ruler in Niger State.

Gov. Aku dancing with party supporters at a rally.



Late Mr Emmanuel Isa Odoma
Deputy Governor Benue State,
Commissioner for Justice
and Attorney-General.

Mr J. M. Shuaibu
Commissioner for Health.

Dr Joseph Orban Nyiakura
Commissioner for Local
Government Youth and Sports.

Mr A. I. Augereke
Commissioner for Finance.

Mr G. I. Okpe
Commissioner for Health.

Mr Moses U. Abi
Commissioner for Rural Development and Co-operatives.

Elizabeth A. Ivase (Mrs)
Commissioner for Special Duties (Parastatals).

Mr Mvendaga Jibo
Commissioner for Education.

Mr Kpamor J. T. Orkar
Commissioner for Works and
Transport.

Mr Adejo A. Ogiri
Commissioner for Animal and
Forestry Resources.

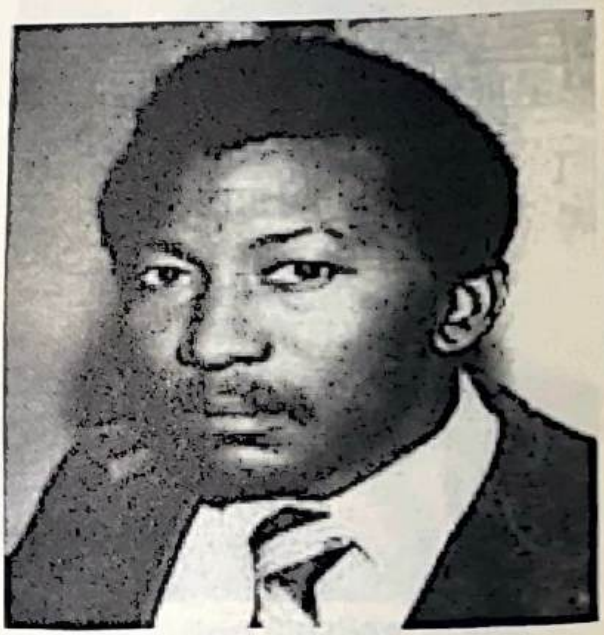
Mr Sule Iyaji
Commissioner for Agriculture and
Natural Resources.

Mr Vincent Tyoikaa Uji
Commissioner for Housing and
Environment.

Mr Abu John Ali
Commissioner for Trade and Industries.

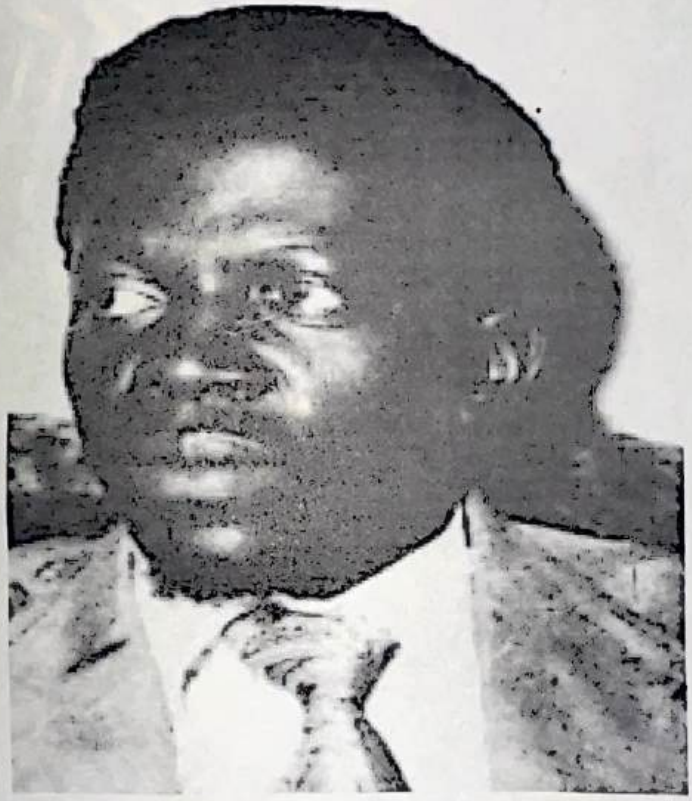
Mr Nelson Onojo
Adviser on Security.

Peter Vande Acka
Political Adviser.

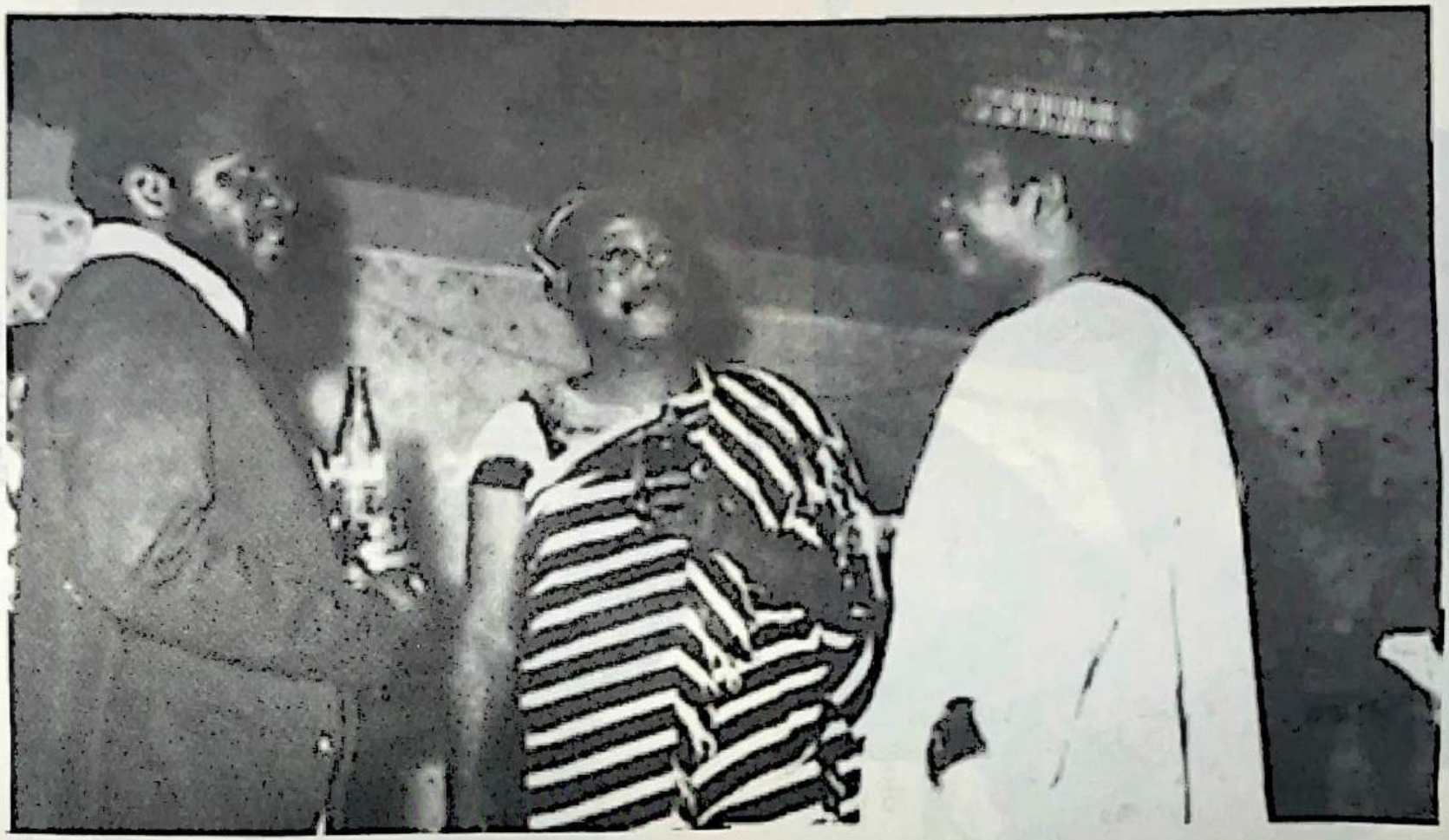


Toryima Orga
Economic Adviser.

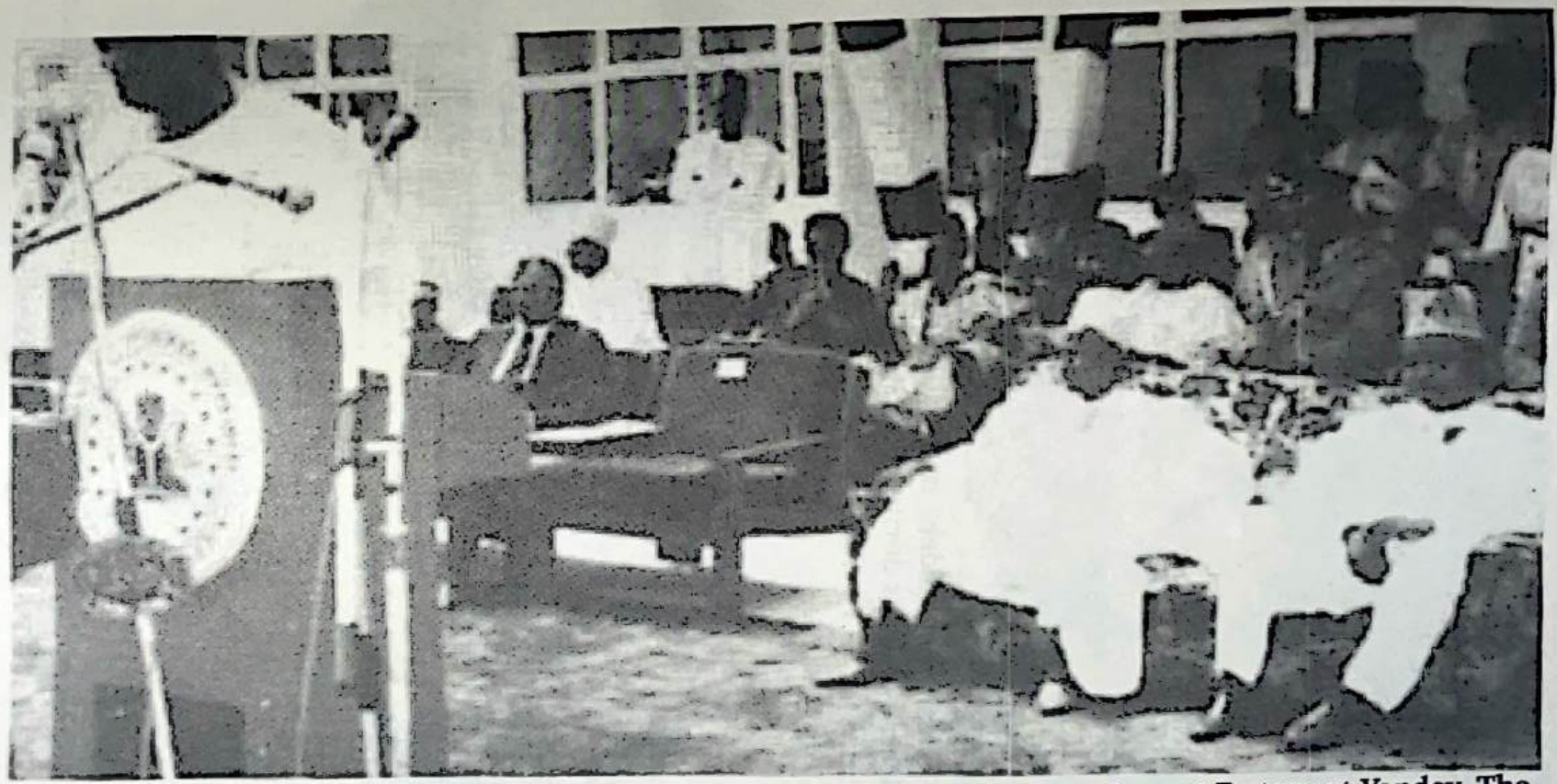
Late Simon-Peter Sarwuan Gusah
Special Adviser and Director of Budget.



Mr O. D. Tebu
Secretary to the State Government.



It was not all business. The Military Administrator chats with the KWANDE L. G. Chairman, Mr Aper Aku at a cocktail party organized in honour of the administrator.



The first official engagement of Mr. President was the opening of Benue Cement Factory at Yandev. The picture shows the Chairman of Board of Directors, Alhaji A. Adamu reading his welcome address at the opening ceremony.

President Shagari resplendent in Tiv traditional attire, responds to a welcome address during the civic reception in Gboko.

Governor Aku introducing the Secretary to the State Government, Mr O. D. Tebu to the President.

Region, Western Region and Eastern Region.

After the first exercise of creation of states by the military in 1967, it became clear that even the major ethnic groups, when left on their own, would continue to have this type of problem of minorities among themselves feeling deprived. It was also very clear that there are minorities within the minorities. For example, the Idoma and the Igala are minorities within the Benue triumvirate of Tiv, Idoma and Igala. It was an attempt to solve this new problem that led to the creation of more states in 1975 which I have referred to earlier.

In my mind, therefore, creation of more states at this time will not solve the problem of more demands from the majority ethnic groups for more states, nor would it solve that of demand from minorities within the minorities. What the people should not forget is that, when General Ironsi tactlessly declared a Unitary Government in Nigeria, the issue sparked off the wave of resentment and violence in which he finally lost his life (May his soul rest in peace).

I would like to warn this nation that, although we are not referred to as a federation, our financial position is so bad that we are almost totally dependent on the Federal Government to run the nineteen state administrations. We are also almost completely dependent on the Federal Government for the running of the local Governments. This situation in my mind is already not good for a true federal set up. We are already over dependent on the Federal government. Whatever the Constitution may say on separation of powers between the Federal Government and the states, the financial position can force us to behave as if we were running a Unitary Government. This position makes nonsense of the concept of Federalism, and I believe that a federal system utterly dependent on the centre becomes a defacto unitary system.

Our efforts, therefore, at this point in time should be concentrated on how to develop the existing states so that they can have a greater measure of economic independence for the benefit of the populace in particular and the Federal Government in general and consider the question of creation of more states at the beginning of the next century.

As I said earlier, I concede that some four more states should be created immediately. We should have statesmen in this country who should agree on where these new 4 states should be created. A few boundary adjustments should be made during the same exercise so

that those who find themselves less happy where they are should have the opportunity of swinging to where they want.

Two questions still stare us in the face:

1. What is the fate of those who though major ethnic groups, still feel that they are minorities? In Ogun State for example, we tend to believe that there would be no minority / majority arguments. But you need to visit the state and see the sharp division between the Ijebus and the Egbas.
2. What is the fate of minorities within minorities? I have given an example of the Tiv versus Idoma/Igala trichotomy.

This is where my principle of zoning and rotation applies. I strongly believe that if we want to halt the present wave of state demands to avoid turning this country into a unitary system by default, we must amend our Constitution to provide safeguards for the rights of all minorities.

My earlier proposal for zoning and rotation of power concentrated primarily on what should happen at the Federal level. This time, it is to concentrate on what should happen at the state level. I maintain that an acceptable zoning pattern should be made in each state of the federation. Depending on the complexity of its composition, some states may simply have two zones, some three, some four or even five. The constitutional reference to each state should be amended accordingly to accommodate these zones and recognize them as the means of periodic sharing of the topmost office in each state.

This, in my view, will allay the fears of the minorities within the minorities since the Constitution will make it possible for them too to produce the Chief Executive in the state whenever it is their turn.

I believe that this arrangement can scale down the surge of demands for more states that is coming up at the moment. I urge all statesmen to look at this problem from the economic point of view. As an insider, that is to say, a governor of one of the states at this material time, I probably see it better how the economic recession and the oil glut are hitting our economy. People of this nation over the last decade have become used to the oil boom economy, and for sometime, it looked as if money was not our

problem, but how to spend it was.

Now the situation is reversed. Money is our problem. Many capital projects, both at federal and state levels, have either been suspended or are moving at such a slow pace that one can never tell when some of these projects would be completed.

To create the number of states being demanded at this stage when the existing ones can hardly keep their heads above the water level, in my mind, will not be in the best overall interest of the country. I still maintain that, for the time being, therefore, only four more states should be created. Abuja should also be granted state status. At the same time, the Constitution should be amended to accommodate the fears of the minorities as well as minorities within minorities through the zoning and rotation system both at the federal and the state levels.

Chapter

11

A Fresh Mandate of Crises

At about mid-day of July 29, 1982, the medium-sized hall at Government House Makurdi took more than its normal capacity as the crowded hall-room awaited the arrival of the host. It was the day Aper Aku, then governor of Benue State, was set to seek for a fresh mandate to fly the flag of the National Party of Nigeria, NPN. In the audience were the Deputy Governor, Isa Odoma, Speaker of the State House of Assembly, Hon. Ayua Num, state commissioners, the party's top-notchers in the state as well as some of the state's members of National Assembly and the cream of Benue Press Corps.

On the morning of that day, word had gone round that the governor would address the press. That left the press community speculating on what issue the governor would be addressing. The audience did not wait long before Aku walked in and read out his prepared text. The speech, which was titled "The Imperative for a Second Term", lasted about five minutes only.

Governor Aku's countenance looked more of a ready war horse when he announced at that crowded press conference that he had decided to seek re-nomination to contest for the governorship seat for a second term in 1983. Before now, there were feelers of growing threats over Aku's re-nomination bid. These threats had become a subject of debate here and there across the state. This was more so because most of the threats were said to have originated from within the party structure in the state with significant influence from

outside.

The fact was that people, who wanted to be nominated on the platform of the NPN, believed that securing the ticket guaranteed them the governorship. That, of course, made the seat of the incumbent threatened. It was, however, seen by some leaders of the party that it was a healthy sign. And of course, this was not happening in other parties.

Vincent Uji, himself a lawyer and former Attorney-General and Commissioner of Justice and a trusted ally of the former governor, confided in the author that part of the threats to Aku's second term bid in 1983 was because "Tiv politics hates maximizing power." He said most of the Tiv elites saw NPN as a party not suitable to accommodate their ambitions. And that Aku was not in the mould as one who would take state funds and dish out to the elites and as such it didn't go down well with them. It was on this score that the party and Aku were not popular amongst them.

At close quarters, Aku exuded the imposing presence of an Archbishop giving off at once warmth, grace and dignity. Contrary to newspaper pictures, which portrayed him in his traditional robes as a wizened unsmiling sage with a walrus moustache, the foremost anti-corruption crusader would easily lighten up and establish a rapport with you so effortlessly.

He would speak in a drawl, picking his syllables ever so softly, jabbing the air occasionally for emphasis, spurning prepared texts proffered by his diligent aides. For those who met Aku before he passed on, he struck them as a man who was stubborn about following his instincts no matter whose ox was gored. He was determined in his pursuit of anything positive to contain any other intervening force that he suspected was contrary to his vision which he sought to achieve.

"I would like to thank you all," Aku began, "for your enthusiastic attendance to this meeting. This goodwill which I have enjoyed from most members of the press," he said, "has been indispensable to the functioning of my administration." He said that the occasion was not "to chastise my detractors neither will I engage in unhealthy diatribes against political opponents. It is not my style and today is not the day for such negative activity," he told the audience.

Then he pronounced the words: "I invited you to inform you that I have decided to seek re-nomination as Governor of Benue State on the platform of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and

within the procedures laid down by the party." The hall exploded in applause and approval. He continued: "I arrived at this decision after going round the state and meeting with important political leaders at the local government and constituency levels. You must also have noted from the mass media and other information channels the massive support and encouragement I have been receiving not only in Benue State but throughout Nigeria."

Aku had explained that it was not only the massive support and encouragement he had received that motivated him to seek re-nomination. "Some of you," he pointed out, "who have followed my statements in discussions and debates will recall that I have even suggested that a six-year term is more suitable for any administration to clear the house on past problems and projects." It was only after such house clearing, he said, that the administration can then plan its own programmes and complete them. Otherwise, he added, "you may end up with a muddle, in fact, a mess."

For Benue State, he said: "We inherited a lot of backlog of uncompleted or abandoned projects." This situation, he observed, delayed new projects. Consequently, their completion was also delayed. Those who understood the history of Benue State then knew what the former governor meant. He would not brag about his administration's achievements because: "It is against my philosophy of life to boast."

That was when he declared that "those who have sincerely and judiciously followed my administration's activities need not be reminded about specific achievements since the information and evidence is available through the various arms of government responsible to these sphere of activities."

On a more personal note he said:

> My modest contribution to this state started with a small development oriented company in 1971. I later joined the political struggle, having been inspired by others through their selfless commitment and devotion. In our multiethnic state and a plural society, I was inspired by all those who untiringly fought to unite Nigeria and to ensure that our country becomes an egalitarian and prejudice free society. This part of Nigeria has carried a large share of the contribution to build a greater Nigeria. I will personally not condone any attempts to impede progress and turn back the hand of the clock.

He refrained from dwelling too much on the history of Benue State, adding that there are too many painful memories. He insisted that his task is to build. "I am a builder not a destroyer," he declared.

This, Governor Aku said, is why he would not allow the destroyers to hoodwink the wonderful people of Benue State. He expressed concern for programmes in the areas of rural electrification, water supply and the new educational policy he had just set to roll. In summary, Aku told his audience: "I want to state that I seek re-nomination in order to complete my major programmes."

Aku thanked all those who had come out in the open to support and encourage him and also the media, who he said had given him their support through their own perception of national life or personal philosophy, disposition or occupation. In conclusion, the former governor applauded the media and other members of the public, whom he said had "been giving constructive criticisms to my programmes. May we all march towards 1983 and in victory."

After the speech, Aku walked amidst thunderous ovation and applause, pumping hands and embracing supporters and admirers. By this time, there could be no better sign to signal the gubernatorial race in Benue State. The main struggle, however, was happening only within the ruling party, the NPN, where five candidates had indicated interest in running. That tended to confirm Mvendaga Jibo's earlier assertion that Benue was a mono-party state.

The first challenge against Aku was fired by former Minister of Communications, Isaac Shaahu, who pulled out of the federal cabinet for the governorship race. Three other aspirants, including Ezekiel Akiga, a close friend of the governor, who resigned from his position as the state's Head of Service, also declared their intention to run. Insiders claim that Aku knew of Akiga's ambition to contest against him barely six months into his first tenure but owing to their closeness, he would not contemplate replacing him at that stage.

But it would suggest that the hunt against Aku did not start because of his second term ambition. It was glaring as soon as he won the elections in 1979. And it was very deadly right from the early days as governor. Barely three months after he was sworn into office, something strange happened. A threat letter was slipped into the governor's living room. The courier was an unsuspecting steward in the Governmnet House that was used by the opponents. In the letter suspected to have been written in blood, the governor was told to get ready, as his life will be wasted and his

blood shed. It got Aku nervous.

The steward was later to be transferred out of the government house without any punishment. After investigations, security operatives traced the letter to the doorsteps of a politician who was bent on causing harm to the governor. The governor did not want him punished as he considered it too early in his administration. Aku was nevertheless afraid. His fears were real, at least, by the contents and character of that blood-inked letter.

Isaac Shaahu

In 1979, after Aku emerged as governor, Shaahu never hid his anger. Even when he was appointed a minister from the House of Representatives, he refused to recognize Aku as his leader. Associates of the governor alleged he thought he deserved the right to be awarded the position. So he renewed his ambition for the 1983 contest. And of course, his cherished profile, which he constantly flaunted, was a history of over two decades of class association with late Tarka and long-standing political experience. But his problems were manifold. Probably because he was around the scene far more than any of his opponents, he was seen by most young people as a spent force and one who has had more than his fair share.

He was, for about six years, a commissioner in the defunct Benue-Plateau State, a government which many Tiv and Benue people in general believed suppressed them.

Again, it was very hard for him to attempt any form of explanation to the electorate in the state the circumstances surrounding his exit from the federal cabinet. His reason for resigning to come home and contest for governorship did not gain acceptance in many quarters. A lot of people thought that it may well have been possible to remain in the federal cabinet and yet contest the position just as was the case with Daniel Ugwu and Dr. Sylvester Ugoh, who were both ministers but had indicated their interest to run for the governorship in their respective states.

Though Shaahu had dismissed insinuations that he would dump the NPN or cause the party to be split because of his ambition and pledged to abide by whatever decision that would be taken at the state congress of the party, he could not sustain his pledge. In a press briefing with journalists at his Gboko residence a few days

later, he warned against fielding a "wrong candidate" for the 1983 polls. He threatened that if it happened, the NPN would lose the election because, according to him, "as far as the Tiv people are concerned, NPN will lose in Benue if a wrong candidate is fielded in next year's governorship election."

On the second anniversary of Tarka's death, former President Shagari came to Benue State and attempted to settle the rift between Aku and Shaahu which began immediately the governor won the NPN ticket in 1979. The president told the party supporters at the rally that Shaahu had promised him that he would always abide by the decisions of the party and that he would live and die as an NPN member as the late Senator did.

But as soon as Shaahu mounted the rostrum to speak at the rally, he stunned even the president. "I have promised," he told the President and the NPN family, "that whatever happens, I have an ambition to run the 1983 gubernatorial race in Benue State. I have been in this game for 21 years, therefore, my ambition is not inordinate," Shaahu declared at the rally. He believed, rightly or wrongly, that he had the rightful claim to take over the Tarka political legacy. Eventually, Shaahu could not withstand the defeat in the NPN. He, alongside some leaders in the party including the Speaker of the State House of Assembly, Ayua Num and Hon. Kundu Swem and their sympathizers, left the party and joined the UPN.

Ezekiel Akiga

Ezekiel Akiga was a long time associate of the governor. He was one of those who had the ears of Aku. The relationship between the two spanned over twenty years since they were some of the first set of Tiv graduates. As Head of Service, Akiga played crucial roles in the two and a half years he spent in Aku's administration. His decision to challenge the same government came as a surprise to many observers and did not earn him respect in many parties and other influential quarters in the state. Those close to Aku saw him as a betrayer and one who was bent on pulling down the house he helped to build.

Before he declared his ambition for the governorship, Akiga maintained a quiet mien among the Benue populace. He had managed to win the argument about whether or not his candidature was acceptable. This controversy had originated at the NPN State

Secretariat in Makurdi that Akiga was neither a politician nor a card-carrying member of the NPN and could therefore not be allowed to seek party nomination.

Former Secretary of the Benue State Chapter of the NPN, Thomas Deggar, came to Akiga's rescue when he ruled that it would be wrong to pronounce anyone a non-member of the NPN at the headquarters unless the party at the person's clan or ward level says so. Of course, it was understandable why Deggar took that position. He, like Akiga, hailed from the Shitile clan. Deggar was also accused of being one of the architects of Akiga's gubernatorial ambition.

Deggar had explained that the constitution of the party talked about party membership at the ward level and that the party constitution does not specify that one had to be a practising politician to be a member of the party. The message was, of course, clear that if the NPN branch at Akiga's ward endorses his candidature, the headquarters will accept. What Deggar probably did not clear was whether the party could entrust its destiny on someone some party men loyal to the governor would prefer to describe as a virtual 'stranger'.

On June 4, 1982, Akiga, in a letter to Aku, said he was leaving his government to save their relationship of over twenty years. This was to pursue his gubernatorial ambition. The three-page letter referenced PL/2/289 and captioned "Strictly Personal and Confidential," read thus:

Mr. A. A. AKU,
The Governor of Benue State,
Makurdi.

Dear Aku,

I write this letter essentially not in my capacity as the Head of Civil Service but foremost as a friend. You will recall you appointed me your Head of Civil Service with effect from 1st October, 1979. You may be aware that the position of the head of Civil Service is first and foremost a position of trust. In realization of this, therefore, throughout my tenure of office I have had one thought uppermost in my mind. This is to justify the trust reposed in me and to perform my duty to such a level that will give credit to government. Whether I succeed in doing this or not, you and other people will judge.

2. One thing that has bothered me very seriously over the past few months and has led to my decision to retire voluntarily from the civil service has been the fact that one or two people who are very close to you have done all they can to sour the good relationship between you and me. These people who claim to be your closest confidants have apparently succeeded in shaking your confidence in me. I appreciate the fact that such people have to earn their daily bread even if it means destroying my name, my reputation and our long-standing friendship. On one or two occasions, I have tried to explain this issue to you. But it appears my efforts have not been as successful as those of my detractors. As a result of this, I felt, quite painfully, that one way of still retaining our friendship is for me to leave.

I will rather leave my job than destroy friendship. You have known me for well over twenty years. During this time, you must have made up your mind on the type of person I am. You will one day discover if these close confidants have been genuinely helpful to you and your cause.

3. If I am out of the Civil Service I will be in a better position to give appropriate responses to such detractors. It will appear to me you have been led into believing that I am bent on destroying you. This has become particularly apparent when I began to lean towards a decision to contest the gubernatorial nomination. You will recall that right at the outset I sent Mr. (John) Gberkon to intimate you of my plans. I further told you that before I take a very final decision on this I will discuss with you. Furthermore, I said he should inform you not to regard my decision as that of an adversary but to assure you that whatever happened you can count on my full support at all times. I still stand by this.

4. As indicated earlier, the ever increasing bitter and dirty attacks on me in the news media and the increasingly politicized nature of my continued stay in office have made it imperative that, in the interest of the civil service, your government and yourself, I should retire.

5. The purpose of this letter, therefore, is to briefly explain a few issues and to put down on record my deep gratitude to you for the honour you did me by appointing me your Head of Civil Service. God willing, I shall repay this kind gesture. One way of repaying you is for me to state in writing here that at no time will I personally participate in any action calculated to destroy your name as a person, neither will I assist anybody who is bent on destroying your government. I have never done so and I will not be part and parcel of such efforts.

If at any time you suspect that I have participated in such an effort I will appreciate if you first confront me with such evidence. I will also like to state that whatever your feelings towards me, I want you to rest assured and to believe that I still remain one of your most trusted friends and I shall always stand by you even if we have some slight political differences. Throughout my tenure of office and our friendship I have never planned to offend you but if for any reason you feel that by an act of Commission or commission I have offended you I crave for your forgiveness. I personally have nothing against you. May God continue to bless you in whatever you do.

Yours very sincerely,

(E.A.AKIGA)
Head of Civil Service,
Benue State.

In another letter to Dr. Akperan Orshi, Tor Tiv III, dated June 17, 1982, under the caption, "Voluntary Retirement from Civil Service", Akiga commended the late traditional ruler for "all the fatherly advice I received from you and other members of your council throughout my tenure in office. Your advice went a long way in helping me to carry out my duties. I am very grateful for all the support and co-operation you gave me. It is my prayer that God will continue to guide and bless you personally and all members of your family and your council in your task of bringing harmony,

peace and progress, not only to your people but also, to the people of Benue State and Nigeria."

On August 6, 1982, just a few months after Akiga had served his notice of resignation from the Aku administration, he addressed a press conference where he challenged the governor and told him not to depend on what he described as "the Tarka magic wand" to win elections but to stand on his own feet.

Akiga indicted the government for incompetence and lack of direction. He even criticized its educational and agricultural policies. Many did not believe that he made the criticisms in good faith. Some argued that if indeed he meant what he was saying, why did it take him two and a half years to speak out? Others wanted to know what he did as a member of the government he just resigned from in tackling these situations. He could not supply any of these answers. However, as one informed observer put it, "Mr. Akiga was either incapable or he was dishonest. Whichever way does not commend him."

Akiga was alleged to have been sponsored by forces from outside the state to challenge Aku over his commitment to the rights of the minorities in the political equation in the country. Akiga's mother was of Kanuri descent from Borno State. Some argue that this was why the northern political leaders saw him as the viable vehicle they could use to truncate Aku's hold on power. Ironically, Aku himself refused to comment on this perception when asked to react. Hear him:

> I don't know how those people finance themselves. Whether it is coming from external forces or internal forces or any other source I don't know. (*New Times;* 1982).

But still, others argue that the political elites in Benue State found Aku too hard to bend. Uji, one of the key actors in the Aku government, told the author that the elites felt they would be better off under a more liberal governor who would dance to their dictates than Aku. Thus, they urged Akiga on, thinking that he could muster enough clout to oust Aku out of office.

As all of this was going on, the party was confronted with another issue. Nomination forms for the 1983 elections meant for Benue State were sent to the state through Shaahu, who by now was badly estranged from Aku. More than a week after he took delivery of the

forms, the state secretariat of the party was not in possession of it. On February 21, 1983, Mr. J.D. Afella, the state Finance/Party Manager wrote to the national secretary of the party reporting non receipt of the nomination forms sent to the party in Benue through Shaahu. Afella specifically accused the former minister, saying he had no respect for the state secretariat of the party in Benue and as such was not in the best position to have been given custody of such documents.

Simon-Peter Sarwuan Gusah

Gusah worked under Aku as the state Director of Budget before his appointment as the Commercial Controller at Benue Cement Company. His entrance into the governorship race was seen as a controversial move. As such, he was not considered a serious contender that could threaten the incumbent. But because he was once a confidant of the governor, it unsettled Aku.

Shortly after he declared his interest in the governorship, he came out saying that he was prepared to accept an alternative but 'befitting' federal appointment in place of running for the governorship. His ambition may have influenced the State House of Assembly to question him for the performance of the commercial department of the Cement Company. The legislators said, despite the fact that cement was produced in large quantity in Benue State, the product was hard to come by. The lawmakers ordered the Ministry of Industry to investigate the scarcity. Gusah was undaunted by the tactics of those loyal to the incumbent working against him through the state lawmakers.

Like every shrewed politician, Aku was set to clip every opposition against his second term bid. And he launched out at Gusah. In a letter dated September 30, 1982 with reference No: D/2/V.1/269 and addressed to the Chairman of Benue Cement Company and all the other board members of the company, the governor demanded that the board put a check on Gusah and ask him to quit the company since he had finally filed his nomination papers with the party ahead of the 1983 gubernatorial elections. Gusah was asked to borrow a leaf from Alhaji Bamanga Tukur who had resigned as the General Manager of the Nigeria Ports Authority to run for the governorship of his home state of Gongola. "I expect now that it is clear that Mr. Gusah has filed his papers with the party for nomination, he could

quit the job with immediate effect," Aku noted in the two-page letter marked "Top secret."

Aku's letter influenced the decision of the board of directors of Benue Cement Company against Gusah. In a resolution after one of its board meetings, the directors sought to know from Gusah in a letter dated October 11, 1982 if he was still a staff of the company. The board had in its resolution barred employees of the company in whatever category from being actively involved in political or any other activities which might be regarded as prejudicial to the interests of the company.

But Gusah was not pleased with the resolution of the BCC board. He headed to the courts to challenge that resolution. In a suit filed on his behalf by Chris Anjira, a Makurdi based legal practitioner, Gusah asked the court to compel the Chairman of the board, Alhaji Abdullahi Adamu, and ten others to jointly and severally pay him the sum of five hundred thousand naira (₦500, 000.00) "as damages for injuries he suffered" as a result of the resolution which was passed by the board and conveyed to him via a letter dated October 11, 1982.

Gusah insisted that the resolution of the board on October 8, 1982 was not only "outside the terms and conditions of his employment" with the company but also a violation of his fundamental human rights. Consequently, he sought a declaration from the courts that Benue Cement Company, its agents, successors and or whosoever be stopped from further acts of intimidation on him or from taking any step to initiate the move or action detrimental to him, pursuant to the said resolution. The case was yet to be determined when he lost out in the governorship primaries.

But Gusah was not done yet in his war against Aku. Immediately after the gubernatorial primaries held in the state on October 28, 1982, Gusah filed a petition against the outcome of the primaries. He challenged the decision of the Alhaji Aminu Tijjani-led gubernatorial nomination panel to return Aku as the candidate of the party for the 1983 elections. Gusah alleged, among other things, that the election was fraught with large scale irregularities and therefore should be cancelled and a fresh one conducted. But Senator Uba Ahmed, former National Secretary of the party, dismissed the petition, saying it had failed to prove cases of irregular conduct of the election.

Governor Aku himself would not let Gusah's petition go

unreplied. In a five-page reply to the NPN Appeal Committee on Gubernatorial Nominations, the governor asked the committee to discountenance the petition. He insisted that his nomination was the freest and should be counted by the party as "most strategic to the party." Besides, Aku noted that "no amount of fresh elections in the state could affect my political fortunes in the state because I enjoy complete and total support of the electorate right from the grassroot." He then urged his fellow contestants to join hands with him in ensuring that the party records a landslide victory at the 1983 polls.

As it turned out, it is not clear if Gusah was persuaded not to push any further. At a press conference shortly after that response from the party's national headquarters, he pledged his loyalty to the party supremacy but reasoned that "it would have been more satisfactory if the party scribe had taken time to let them know on what grounds their appeal against the nomination of Governor Aku had failed or in the alternative, the rationale for ratifying same." He however admitted he was satisfied that the cause of democracy had been fully served in the matter and that because he was in obedience to party supremacy and unity of the party, he was prepared to let the matter rest.

Gusah said, in spite of personal injury inflicted upon him in this and other matters, he was prepared to accept and be bound by the party's decision on its official candidates for the forthcoming elections.

The result of the governorship primaries had already begun tearing the NPN in the state apart along two divides. While some people claimed to represent the real NPN as epitomized by the late Tarka, another group declared its support for the governor. Gusah, at the press conference, distanced himself from the "Tarka NPN." He said his alleged association with the group was a mixed cup. He told reporters at the press conference that he had maintained a 'yes' and 'no' stand to the "Tarka NPN."

The reason for this, he said, was that, apart from a casual conversation that he had with Hon. Kundu Swem over six months before, when they both bemoaned the departure of NPN in Benue State from the ideals late Senator Chief Tarka had for it and the need to steer the party back to these ideals, he was "not involved in any plans for the launching of the splinter group."

Of course, the former governorship aspirant acknowledged why

organizers of the "Tarka NPN" would be reluctant to recruit people like him. He said, by common consent, he was known, not just as an articulate personality but also a blunt and forthright person who is rather short of some of the goods of this world like money. As he put it, the game of politics is for the strong, especially cash strong. Gusah, therefore, reasoned that it was needless to "suffer a middle aged aesthetic for the dubious reward of being told home truths."

On the other hand, Gusah said he was unrepentant about the fact that he was committed to *Tarkarism* and to that context would associate himself with any cause designed to promote the higher and noble ideals for which the late Senator Chief J.S. Tarka lived and died. Gusah was associated politically with the late Tarka from 1957 until his death. As a result of this, he was of the opinion that it was not by forming a splinter group in the NPN that the ideals Tarka stood for would be better served in an election year. Rather, he told his supporters that the late Senator would have preferred to strain every nerve in his body to find a solution to the political problems in Benue State within the framework of unity in the NPN.

He outlined some options to ensure success for the party in the state if the party must win in the elections ahead. One, that the governor, who as one person stood to gain or lose most by unity and concord or lack of it within the Benue State wing of the NPN, must accept responsibility for, and create conditions that would enhance cohesion and harmony within the party. He also demanded that the suspension placed on all members hitherto should be lifted.

For the avoidance of doubt, Gusah asked proponents of "Tarka NPN" if their aim was to achieve the ideals of the late politician and at the same time prevent members of NPN in the state from crossing over to other parties or they were out only to destroy the electoral chances, first, of Aku, and then that of other candidates of their great party. He warned that if the proponents of the splinter group masquerading as pro-Tarka were not out to safeguard the electoral fortunes of the party at the polls, they should restrain from abusing the memory of a great man for their selfish vendetta. And as he put it, "We need to consolidate our resources to fight and win all the elections this year."

Samu Ihur

He was a man of moderate means, who nobody wanted to talk about or even identify with, except those in the Pentecostal fold who simply saw him as just one of them. His campaigns did not make much impact.

To close observers of Benue politics at the time, the declaration by Aku for a second term did not come as a surprise. It was expected. Just three weeks before that declaration, there were torrents of declarations of support and unalloyed confidence in his administration by various groups from many sections and communities of the state. The Igalas, Idomas and all NPN local government chapters openly gave the governor their words and mandate to continue.

Incidentally, the fight for who should get the governorship ticket was largely restricted to the Tiv speaking area. And that accounted for the ugly incidences of violence that was visited on the Tiv area. The Idoma and Igala local government areas remained peaceful. Former Commissioner for Finance, Chief Godwin Okpe, told the *New Times* magazine that there were "no qualms" in Idoma's support for Aku for a second term.

> We have given the Governor our mandate because we think there should be continuity and he has initiated a lot of projects which he needs to complete. The essence of all we are doing is service. Unless a governor has performed very badly in the first term my personal view is that he stays. We believe that the incumbent has not done badly.

Okpe said that even if for any reason Aku changed his mind and steps out of the race, the governorship will not go to any of the Tiv candidates who were seeking it. Rather, he said, it will be the turn of the next zone to provide the next governor according to the constitution.

As was the case in 1979, Shaahu, Akiga, Gusah and Ihur continued with their campaign oblivious of the unfolding events. They hinged their resolve to contest for the seat on their fundamental right as Nigerian citizens who could seek for any elective office in the country. This continued to wreak more havoc on the party in the state as the NPN remained largely divided. Meanwhile, Aku was able to get the Idomas and the Igalas to queue behind him. Because

of the personalities in the contest, it was not easy to avoid the conflict in the party. That also forced the national secretariat to mandate Alhaji Adamu Ciroma to resolve the crises in the Benue chapter of the party. Somehow, Ciroma's mission to Benue was seen more as a strategy to push Aku out but he survived it.

Aku Takes on His Opponents

By 1982, the Nigerian economy began to witness oil glut. It was, therefore, tough times for incumbents. It affected both the federal and state governments. And Benue was one of the worst hit in the sense that it had little to gain from internally generated revenue in comparison to other bigger states. This was one of the weak links of Aku's second term bid. But he trudged on. In an interview he granted *New Times* magazine (Vol.2 N0. 40, August 1982), after he announced his intention to seek re-election, he talked about his government, his party and many other issues and declared bluntly that the quartet of Shaahu, Akiga, Gusah and Samu Ihur, who were contesting against him, "are joking".

Q: Sir, looking back now, would you say that your administration has met its set targets?

A: Most of the targets have fallen short of reaching the point we want at the time we wanted it. This can be traced to two major reasons all connected with money! The first reason has to do with the fact that we inherited a lot of projects and had to start our own projects later than we expected. The second reason is the present oil glut. But we are sure all these will be met before September 1983 and those that we cannot put together actually constitute why I am seeking re-nomination.

Q: Can you comment on the accusations of incompetence leveled against your administration by your gubernatorial opponents?

A: Now that I have declared, there are two things we have to do. Those who have said it and myself. We have all got to talk to the electorate and point out what you are saying. I aim to tell the electorate that my administration was not incompetent and show them physically why I think so. It is up to them also to continue to tell the electorate that my

administration is incompetent and to point out the areas that they think are deficient. Subsequent to this, is the normal debate statewide? As far as I am concerned, I have supporting facts and figures as well as physical evidence which you can cross check in order to make up your mind. In the end, it is the electorate that will decide. Right now as I am talking with you, all humility and modesty the electorate know that the others are joking. "I have no doubt that in 1983 the NPN will poll at least 85 to 90 per cent of the votes in the state."

Q: Sir, Ezekiel Akiga, your former Head of Service, who is today easily the most controversial aspirant to your office, has said that he quit your administration because he disagreed with the administration's general direction. He said that instead of choosing two or three programmes as priorities and tackling other minor but essential ones logically, the state had embarked on massive land clearing, education and health programmes which it cannot complete. Sir, he likened the situation to one running faster than his legs. What are your comments?

A: Somebody asked me this question, I didn't like the way it was put. Except somebody understands NPN and the way it is run, otherwise you'll run into trouble. NPN is the most democratic party. It has its own set programmes. And it does not consider it its duty to ask anybody how it goes about its programmes. What they want to see is the result. So if I want to choose socialist methods to bring achievement to my Green Revolution programme, that is not anybody's business. If I want to choose the most reactionary and conservative method, it is nobody's business. But as far as I am concerned, my administration has achieved results and despite all the difficulties as we ran into unexpectedly because of the oil glut, we are taking our radical turn to achieve the maximum we can to the people. We are sure to succeed and I am glad that anybody who hasn't got the guts has left.

Q: Do you see that forces outside the state are behind the emergence of many opponents seeking party nomination

for governorship with you?

A: That is an area that I would not like to comment on. I don't know how those people finance themselves, whether it is coming from external forces or internal forces or any other source I don't know.

Q: The oil glut is obvious, but one observes from talking to your commissioners, that shortage of funds is a bit acute here. What is your administration doing towards generating more funds internally?

A: The fact is that Benue State started very late. Take Lagos for instance; take the number of industries or how many people work there. Even the PAYE alone, which is normally retained by State Government, is big revenue. Lagos cannot have this kind of problem that we have here. At least to this extent. Recently we have been discussing this question of sales tax. But even when we come to sales tax, it still does not compete with, say, Anambra or Imo and the like. So most of the internal resources that we are working towards tapping will not necessarily at this stage give us what we want. That is why we would like to concentrate on areas of agriculture, because here we'll find that the lifestyle of the people can be changed through what they have done and still do. Even right now you could have noticed if you went round the villages that nobody is actually unhappy. There is no shortage of food. What to spend is what their problem is. And what becomes worse is when you cannot get what you want to eat. So it is true that money is a problem for most of the programmes but we don't have to relent. We have no intention of closing down or stopping any given project. We just need to rearrange priorities.

Q: Some critics charge that your land development policy seems not to have been properly co-ordinated. They are of the view that the implementation had gone far before the administration knew what they actually wanted to do. They point out, for instance, that some lands cleared about three years ago have not been cropped. What is your comment?

A: When did I start the land clearing programme? You can

see for yourself that that is blunt and he was polliticking or playing to the gallery. The land development programme only started last year (1981). So it can never be three years. So for people to be saying this kind of thing is just ridiculous. You see we ordered four of these tractors. They arrived and assembled too late for the cropping. But you should look at land clearing as infrastructural development. It must have taken some of the felled trees about 50 years to get to the stage they were.

Q: The NPP has just published a release in which they alleged that you claimed ₦1,000 per day as estacode for your recent private visit abroad which lasted about 21 days?

A: One thing I will like to make clear to you is that the governor at all times is never a private individual. The visit is described as private simply because I did not plan for any specific public job to go and do. It could be a holiday if I like but that can be done at the expense of the government. This particular one was not a holiday. It was a trip I made in a very hasty manner. Actually my wife was seriously ill and had undergone a major operation. If those NPP mischievous people who went and bought the documents on my foreign exchange had read the form I filled they will discover that I did not even hide any fact in the form. These facts I have disclosed to you were included in the form. Why I had to go to US at that time and why I needed a foreign exchange up to that amount and in fact I spent more than half of that money on paying the hospital bills. And if my wife were not resident as a student and had already hired her own apartment, where I stayed during those nineteen days the money would not have been enough for me to stay there. And in fact there is no single governor in this country who would have stayed in Pittsburg under the conditions I stayed. To take ₦21, 000 as estacode, whatever you call it, to spend more than half of that to pay hospital bills for my wife, and then use the rest to maintain myself and my wife at that time during that period of nineteen days in the US. Most of these other governors would have taken a Presidential suite which will cost more than $1,000 a day just for accommodation.

Q: Sir, if I remember correctly you were once quoted as saying that you will feed the nation if you are given about one-tenth of what the Federal Government spends on agriculture presently. How will you do it?

A: Although the Federal Government has given me almost nothing for my Green Revolution programme, I have committed nearly ₦40 million for land development. I have already bought tractors. What I need now is to have efficient maintenance service of my tractors and also have efficient supervision corps in order to make sure that every bit of land is used. Supposing I have all these land cleared as I wanted and more, have them cropped, fertilizing them at the appropriate time; and properly taken care of, this of course needs money; but the proceeds should be enough to feed the nation.

Q: You have been championing the cause of Federal Government neglect of Benue State. Recently however during his visit to this state, the Vice-President refuted this, arguing that Benue State was even being given preferential treatment. Senator Ebute too has recently come up against your position in this matter citing some specific Federal Government projects in Benue State?

A: What specific projects did the Vice-President and Senator Ebute cite which if you compare with other states justify countering my argument? I have to get that clear in my mind before I can answer that question.

Q: The Senator listed UNITECH, Makurdi Airport, Benue Cement and the proposed Benue Steel Complex.

A: As far as I know, the Federal Government has not made any announcement even up to now that I am talking. There has been no specific announcement from the Federal Government that they were going to build a Steel Complex in Benue State. And if you hear people murmuring that maybe there is going to be a steel complex, it is because I have made a lot of noise about it. As of now we don't have any airport. We are using a military airport. So it is not for anybody to say we have been given any airport. Until an

airport is built, I will not take it that we have yet got any airport. Nobody should talk about the cement partly because that factory with all its plants and everything was started long ago and work on it was almost completed before this administration came in to being and it was completed just on time when the President was here on tour to commission the building. But its planning and execution took place long ago. But may I also add that it is not current to refer to Benue Cement as a Federal project. It is true that the Federal Government has a majority shareholding in the project. It should be remembered that Benue State is the second largest shareholder in that project. So for the two reasons it is not correct to list those projects as examples for one wanting to say that Benue State stands neglected. The Federal Government may have some things in the pipeline. I can't deny them that but as far as I am concerned until the execution of such projects starts as a plan of the present administration until the execution is announced and started I will consider Federal presence in those areas is yet to be felt.

Q: The issue of sharing the assets of the defunct Benue-Plateau State has generated considerable controversy. What is the exact position now?

A: Well, if we say we go into the whole problem of sharing of our assets, we can never arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. So we don't even discuss it in its totality because when we were leaving there were so many things that the Federal Government promised that they would give us but when we came these things were not provided. Take Plateau Publishing Company for example, it was Benue-Plateau Publishing Company. We just withdrew from it and nobody gave us any money to start any such thing here until recently, from our own other resources I have now managed to set up Benue Printing Publishing Corporation. We have no intention of going into open discussion with Plateau State Government on all that. Ironically it was this question of assets that were leased from some officers and it was decided that these assets should be shared between Plateau State Government and Benue State Government.

> And all efforts to arrive at an acceptable settlement on this with Plateau State Government seem to be failing and that is why the controversy is still yet to be resolved. *New Times Magazine, Vol. 2 No 80; August 1982.*

Ver Agelaga, one of Aku's trusted loyalists, told the author in an interview that Aku was particularly pained by the decision of Akiga and Gusah to contest against him because of the confidence he had in them.

External Plots Against Aku's Re-election

Although Aku dismissed insinuations that some external forces were against his re-election, there were strong indications that some foreign interests outside of Benue State were oiling his opponents in the 1983 re-election. A one-time powerful minister in Shagari's government was fingered to be leading the onslaught. He was said to be acting the script of the northern establishment who felt irritated by the minority rights crusade that Aku was agitating for. They were, therefore, particularly determined to get Aku out of their way alongside Governors Okilo of old Rivers State and Isong of Cross River to ensure that their interests were protected.

One of such strategies was the widely circulated news that the national headquarters of the NPN had concluded plans to drop four of its incumbent governors. There were Aper Aku of Benue State; Melford Okilo, Rivers; Alhaji Adamu Atta of Kwara and Alhaji Awwal Ibrahim of Niger State. Adamu Attah had a running battle with his political godfather, Dr. Olusola Saraki who also doubled as the Senate Leader. Even though Atta was to later apologize to the people of Kwara State over "his role in the crises" of the party in the state, Saraki was already fed up with him. Saraki had warned severally that Atta's victory at the party primaries would spell disaster for the NPN. He insisted that, since the governor had done nothing for the state, "he will be an impossible candidate to sell. "Any rat", he said "will defeat him." And that 'rat' later turned out to be Chief Cornelious Adebayo of the UPN.

The national secretariat of the party too was up for some games against Saraki, they seemed to have made up their mind not to tow his line. At the election into the state executive committee of the party, Saraki was replaced by Mallam Babatunde Kasum. The

election was conducted by Inua Wada. Saraki was angry. And he didn't hide his anger. He accused the chairman of the electoral panel of aiding and abetting rigging.

The decision of the party to suspend these four governors was said to have been based on the report of a "Special Nomination Committee of the NPN" which allegedly submitted its report to Umaru Dikko who was the chairman of the NPN campaign organization for the 1983 polls. Not to be taken unawares, the Benue State wing of the party moved swiftly. They dismissed the position of the national headquarters of the party and said no special committee was set up for the purpose of the elections. It then advised supporters of the governor to discountenance such misleading information but continue to work hard for the success of the governor.

Back home in Benue, the State Secretary of the party, Degarr was busy fine-tuning his strategy to get Aku out of the way and possibly get Akiga, his kinsman in. He had announced that nomination papers filed by the governor, Akiga, Shaahu and Gusah were rejected because, according to him, the papers were not endorsed by party executives in their various local governments. By this action, it was obvious that Degarr had crossed Aku's path and would surely be kicked out. This was going on at the same time that a faction of the party that had earlier been suspended announced the suspension of the governor, the state party chairman, Chief J.C. Obande and Peter Vande Acka, the former Political Adviser, to Aku among others.

In a swift reaction the following day, the state Organising Secretary of the party, Mr. S. O. Adigbe countered Degarr. He announced that the papers filed by the governor were accepted by the state secretariat of the party because Aku had complied with the party guidelines, except those of his three opponents.

1983 Governorship Ticket as Prized Trophy

In spite of the show of bravado, Aku was distracted considerably by the barrage of opposition from within and outside the NPN. Nevertheless, he was determined to overwhelm them. And he did, but at a great price because it really took its toll on him. This situation created more gulfs in the Benue wing of the NPN thereby pitching the governor against some top members of the party including the

national secretariat.

Alhaji Aminu Tijjani headed the panel that supervised the governorship primaries in Benue State. His attempt to ensure that all the candidates come out of the congress without complaints met a brick wall as none of them was ready to concede to another. He left the Benue NPN more divided than he met it. The dramatis personae were adamant. And that gave rise to a heated struggle for who would win the governorship ticket in Benue State.

Hon. Ugbah Uyeh told the author that to arrest the drift, the national secretariat stepped into the Benue crises and sent a four-man team led by Malam Adamu Ciroma to intervene and seek reconciliation among the warring factions. Some measure of understanding was reached. The Ciroma committee then decided to re-organize the party in the state to ensure that whoever won the party's nomination did so with reasonable acceptance.

As it turned out, the other four aspirants could not form a united front to challenge the governor at the party primaries. Before now, the four aspirants had formed an association of aspirants. They were seemingly very powerful and they met regularly.

At a point, they said they didn't mind if any of them became the governor other than Aku. But their vaulting ambition could not allow them to properly articulate themselves in endorsing one of them. Some NPN members revealed that it was interesting that anytime they met, they did not agree among themselves. When they were incapable of picking one among themselves to lead, they in turn engaged in casting aspersions at Aku in the false belief that by doing so, they will win the sympathy of the people and possibly win the party ticket. That strategy failed.

By this time, confusion had set in the Benue State chapter of the NPN as there were suspensions and counter-suspensions. Former State Chairman of the party, Chief J.C. Obande, who was also rumoured to be among the prime movers of the renegade 'Tarka NPN' splinter group led by Shaahu, tried hard to wriggle himself out so as not to court the anger of the state governor. At a press conference he addressed in Makurdi in the haze of all of these, Obande accused some leaders of the party who were punished for earlier acts of indiscipline of constituting themselves into a gang for the purpose of causing confusion and destabilizing the party in the state. He raised the alarm that these people were bent on dragging him into their unholy group.

Obande too was angry with the actions of the people which he said were tantamount to blackmail and defamation of his person by associating him with the 'Tarka NPN' He said even though he and Tarka related well politically, using his name to destroy what he had built over the years was counter-productive. He insisted that the state N.E.C of the party would only reconsider the suspension of Hon. Isaac Shaahu, Hon. Ayua Num and Hon. Kundu Swem, among others, when the state wing of the party was convinced that there was true element of remorse and repentance on their part before they will be forgiven. Obande maintained strongly that he could not support to destroy the party he and other patriots helped to build.

Obande's exco was too pressed to ignore the mounting pressure from the suspended party leaders and the national leadership of the party, on the issue of levels 1 and 2 congresses which the Shaahu group was pushing that the results be discountenanced and a fresh one conducted. In a volle face, he told reporters at the press conference that his exco was reconsidering a review of the exercise.

In a twist however, precisely on February 22, 1983, the Benue State Executive Committee of the party made a U-turn. The party approved the dissolution of elections conducted in Levels 1 and 2. It ordered that fresh elections to elect delegates be conducted. The communiqué was signed by the state chairman, Chief J.C. Obande, while S.K. Agan signed on behalf of the state secretary. Similar elections were conducted earlier for levels 1 and 2 in the Tiv speaking area in October 1981 at the instance of Shaahu's petition. Shaahu was at that time the Minister of Communications.

This was still going on when the National Secretariat of the party stepped in and ordered the Exco of the party in the state not to change or tamper with the composition of the constituency and the local government executive councils of the party.

Former National Chairman of the party, Chief Adisa Akinloye, and its former National Secretary, Alhaji Suleiman Takuma, both signed a letter addressed to the state executive of the party. They also ordered that members of the party in the state should only recognize the existing levels 1 and 2, representing the constituencies and local government's executives as the party's authorities in their localities.

They explained that this had become necessary because the levels 1 and 2 executives were elected under the supervision of the national

headquarters less than two years before the crises of legitimacy engulfed the state wing of the party. In this wise, they reasoned that the officials at these levels should be in office for a period of four years.

The secretariat also directed the Alhaji Aminu Tijjani nomination panel to be firm and be in full control of the election of delegates from level one to the state constituencies' electoral college and to the senatorial primaries. The panel was mandated to hold regular meetings with the governorship aspirants and in accordance with the party's constitution.

This level of executives, the party leadership maintained, were not therefore subject to any other election within four years except as provided for in the constitution. As a way out of the crises that faced the party, the NPN national leadership requested Governor Aku and other aspirants to nominate 18 representatives, each at one for each local government totaling 36 for both sides. These representatives were to form the body which the nomination panel would work with without interference from the state executive council of the party in the nomination processes. Akinloye and Takuma asked the nomination panel to ensure impartially and fairness to all the aspirants.

But as this was going on, some of the aspirants took the party to court, seeking a court injunction to restrain the nomination panel from conducting the election. As was predicted by most people, Shaahu, the former Communications Minister, led the aggrieved aspirants to the courts. Others included S.P. S. Gusah, Ezekiel Akiga, Samu Ihur, Dr. Peter Ochalla and Dandy Ataja. One of the aspirants, Morgan Ogbole, had already withdrawn his candidature from the race.

The new disposition of the national secretariat of the party and perhaps the court action by some of the aspirants delayed the conduct of the governorship primary election for a week. But Chairman of the State Gubernatorial Nomination Panel, Alhaji Tijjani, said that the postponement was to enable his panel and the aspirants to prepare fully for the election. It was earlier scheduled to take place on October 23, 1982 but was later held on Thursday, October 28. After the primary elections, the nomination congress for the three candidates that emerged top from the primary elections was then fixed for Saturday October 31 1982.

Aku succeeded in winning his party's nomination but this left

the party so fractured that another committee was set up by the national headquarters of the party headed by Femi Okunu to handle complaints arising from the nomination exercise. Aku polled 550 votes to defeat Akiga who scored 16. Samu Ihur who went ahead in the primary election got zero. In some specific instances, the NPN like in other parties and some states across the country, was determined to steam-roll the nominations in favour of certain incumbent governors and at the same time stop some. Aku was one of those to be shoved aside. And this led to violence in some cases.

Okunu's committee achieved very little because there was so much bad blood among the rank and file of the party. The ambitions of some of the other gladiators worsened the crises. The NPN in the state had been factionalized between the governor, Shaahu and the state secretary of the party, Degarr. The governor later succeeded in removing Degarr as state secretary of the party and replaced him with Emmanuel Atawodi.

But Aku was determined to heal the wounds after the party primaries. As an astute politician, the governor understood the dangers inherent in a divided house. So on Wednesday November 17, 1982 at press briefing at the Government House Makurdi, he announced a reconciliatory meeting with the other four aspirants. It was aimed at bringing his opponents to the fold in the overall interest of the party as a demonstration of his commitment to the ideals of democratic practices. The meeting was held on Sunday November 21. All the other four NPN gubernatorial aspirants in the state were invited to attend.

In the invitation letter he sent out dated November 16, 1982, Aku recalled his earlier invitation to his fellow contestants in his acceptance speech at the party's nomination congress where he had asked them to join hands with him to steer the ship of the party to success at the polls. He counselled them that it was necessary they forget the past and come together to exchange views on the necessary development aspects of the people of the state. He was however of the opinion that the response of these four party leaders would determine their dedication and commitment to the overall interest of the state, its people and the party. Aku's action was seen as a new chapter in the political history of the state. Of the four aspirants, only Samu Ihur attended the reconciliatory meeting.

Shaahu, however, gave conditions for him to attend the meeting.

He said the meeting had to be held outside Government House Makurdi, preferably in Gboko, because his safety, according to him, was not guaranteed and if he must be part of any such meeting, he will be more at home if it took place in Gboko, a place he considered a neutral ground. Shaahu replied Aku thus.

> I am in receipt of your letter dated 16 November, 1982 in which you are calling for reconciliation in the name of the National Party of Nigeria, 'in preparation for our fight against other political parties.'
>
> You have made a good move, but for many reasons I have, and now that I have come to believe in the many atrocities you have directed against me, and those others that you intend to unleash, I am therefore constrained to call for the meeting at a neutral ground that is Gboko.
>
> Here I am fully protected as against your house where my safety is not guaranteed.
>
> Hoping you will change the venue and inform me accordingly.

But the governor turned down this condition, insisting that the security at Government House was adequate to allay Shaahu's fears. Nothing was achieved from that meeting, hence, only Ihur attended. The events that followed showed the gladiators only sharpened their war artillery as the 1983 elections drew close.

Akiga also declined, insisting that the NPN elections appeal committee had not disposed of his petition against Aku's nomination. Gusah, the former Commercial Controller of BCC, did not respond to the governor's invitation at all.

The animosity in the party degenerated to the point of no return. This led Shaahu, the Speaker of the House of Assembly, Hon. Ayua Num, Hon. Kundu Swem and some of their supporters to dump the NPN for the UPN. They were formally received into the party by the leader of the party and its presidential candidate, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, at a rally in Gboko on May 30, 1983.

Shaahu's decision to join the UPN easily may not be far from a long-standing political alliance the late Tarka's UMBC had with Awolowo's AG in the First Republic. With the exit of this splinter group, the coast was now clear for Aku to face Unongo, Surma

and other candidates at the general elections but with a fragile centre.

Even though the national secretariat of the NPN seemed to have saved Aku from political humiliation, they may have perfected other plans to get at Aku because of his minority rights crusade. The tone of correspondence between Governor Aku and the former national chairman of the party, Chief Akinloye, spoke volumes of this. In a letter to Akinloye, dated February 14, 1983, Aku was terse and combative. He wrote:

> Chief A.M.A. Akinloye
> National Chairman
> National Party of Nigeria
> NPN Headquarters
> Southwest Ikoyi
> Lagos
>
> I have made all efforts to contact you since your election to have frank discussion with you on the so-called problems in Benue State, all without success. It is by nature in me to be very frank with anybody I talk to, so I want to put this very very bluntly to you that you have deliberately refused to understand me and have also deliberately decided to pay attention to those that have disrupted or tried to disrupt the party in Benue State without any sense and subsequently giving impression that factions and discontent appear to exist in Benue State.
>
> Sir, you know very well the position of people like Thomas Degarr and Sani Salihu, the role they played in disrupting the party in Benue State.
>
> You are not ignorant of people like Senator Ebute and the like on this same issue.
>
> I have tried to keep away as much as possible because it is supposed to be unconstitutional for a person who is not strictly a top party official to be making too many statements on matters of this kind.
>
> But now, the situation, with encouragement from National Headquarters, seems to be reaching a point where nobody really knows what the sense of direction is.

I do not recall, and I cannot recall when it was said at the Ibadan NEC that all the elections must start from level one through two before coming to level three. All that was said was that 1982 was election year and there must be elections at all levels. If that order was to be followed as you are indicating must be the case in Benue State, we should in any case must have started the nomination from level one through two and three before coming to level 4 which you yourself won and are now the National Chairman on your second term. In fact, by the time we agreed at Ibadan that elections should be at all levels, in most of the states, the elections at level three had already been carried out. Would you then say that they should all come and dissolve the election at level three in these states and go and start at level one, in which case the one at level four too has to be dissolved.

In my view, this is the type of inconsistency that you are always being accused of. There are copies of letters that your very good self did write together with the then Secretary, permitting that the elections at level three should be held before going down to level one and two. The other thing that was also agreed upon at Ibadan was that elections at levels one and two should not be too elaborate and too expensive to involve the National Headquarters. It was therefore necessary just to get the panels that had already been set and had already conducted the gubernatorial nomination to go ahead and do this for level three so that they in turn would organize the election for levels one and two to avoid (a) cumbersomeness (b) financial involvement.

I think sir, this element of consistency must be maintained and I think sir, we would not like anybody in Benue State to turn round and blame you for any disruption of the party in this state.

I would therefore suggest to you Sir, to carefully think out a good way of solving this problem but not complicating matters in Benue State. You may have already seen in the papers, copies of which I may send to you in case you have not seen how Isaac Shaahu, Thomas

Deggar and the rest of them are trying to cause further confusion within the party and if you condone this kind of thing, I will be forced to suggest that you do not wish the NPN in Benue State well.

I am sorry, I am very personal on this but I have to be because for the brief time I met you or the people that you sent round, I felt hurt about your allegation on the television that people in Benue State did not vote for you but for Chief Kayode. I have no cause to refute that but God knows the truth and I think you believe in a god; but the conscience of the people of Benue State are very clear on that matter. If you prefer to connive with the disgruntled people to disrupt the party in the state, that is too bad.

But let us say that the people of Benue State did not vote for you, should that be the reason to connive with those people so that NPN does not win in Benue State?

As far as I am concerned, I am up to the task and I am ready to abide by all the legitimate rules and regulations of the party but I cannot tolerate the inconsistency of saying one thing today and another tomorrow.

We are even ready to have elections starting from levels one, two and three but if you are doing that, be sure that your national secretariat has enough men who can conduct it fairly and have enough money to cover the whole place within the shortest possible period without affecting the schedule you have fixed for the nomination to the various legislative houses.

I now intend to mobilize myself and start the Gubernatorial campaigns and I do not want anything that instead of keeping this party one, will come and cause disunity or allow disgruntled elements to cause confusion and misrepresent the party as they are doing here; and people like Isaac Shaahu and Thomas Deggar holding meetings with other political parties in Benue State on how to divert votes in Benue State. If that is what you think should happen and you are doing for the party as National Chairman, I assure you I will not allow it to happen in Benue State. Yet, I will keep and abide by all

the rules and regulations of this our great party to Benue State.

Copies of this letter are being sent to the President, the Vice-President, the two Deputy National Chairmen and to the National Secretary of the party for their information and necessary consultation.

I wish you a very successful tenure of office.

Yours sincerely,
APER AKU
GOVERNOR, BENUE STATE.

Without wasting time, Akinloye replied Governor Aku immediately. In his response, which was dated February 15, 1983, the former national chairman of the NPN tried to insulate himself from blame in the crises of the Benue chapter of the NPN. The letter reads:

Mr. Aper Aku,
Governor,
Benue State,
Makurdi.

My dear Governor,

This is to acknowledge with thanks the receipt of your letter dated 14th February, 1983.

I want to assure you that whatever steps the party has taken, particularly in matters pertaining to our Benue branch, are with good intentions. Our desire is to bring about peace, understanding and co-operation among the various elements in the party.

The NEC at the last meeting, in the interest of the solidarity of our party in Benue State decided and directed that levels one and two elections should be held followed by the election congress.

Today, by the grace of God, you are our Party's gubernatorial candidate for this year's general elections and I am sure that you are making all efforts to unite all the members of the party so that they can all go to the

elections as one body behind you and achieve the great success we are looking forward to.

Yours sincerely,
Chief A.M.A. Akinloye
National Chairman.

Aku was not done yet. His political guts again showed up in a follow up correspondence to President Shagari. He told the president how he had the capacity to deal with his detractors. To him, it was a conspiracy strongly aided by the national leadership of the party targeted at frustrating his re-election in 1983.

In the letter with reference No: AI/68V.1/143 dated February 16, 1983 to former President Shagari, Aku accused some leaders, whom he did not specifically name, of interfering in the affairs of the party in the state in connivance with others who continued to exhibit their displeasure on his nomination for a second term. The two-page letter read thus:

His Excellency
Alhaji Shehu Shagari
President of the Federal Republic &
Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces
Ribadu Road
Ikoyi – Lagos

DESTABILISATION OF NPN IN BENUE STATE

I am extremely worried about the way and manner the NPN as a party is being destabilized in Benue State and the people involved are the ones that are supposed to be more concerned about the stability of the party. I would like to point out to you that if I am left on my own, I could have long contained the situation and nobody would still be hearing of these sort of problems now.

Unfortunately, some disgruntled elements who have either been suspended or lost gubernatorial elections are now getting support from some people who are high ranking in the NPN. I have no direct confirmation of this except these people at the National Secretariat who should

be able to contain such behaviour within party are encouraging destabilization and the people come forward to show and do things that they should not do.

This is the reason why I have decided to write to the Chairman of the National Party of Nigeria and have copied you. I intend to be in Lagos tomorrow, Thursday with a selected delegation which will be mostly made up of people in Lagos.

My delegation will consist of:

1. Senator Ahmadu Ali
2. Dr. A. Atanu
3. Mr. A. Ogbe
4. Mrs. E. Ivase

Considering the seriousness of the situation sir, I will be highly obliged if you could make it possible to convene the meeting at which the Chairman of the party, the two Deputy National Chairmen and the National Secretary of the party should be present so that in your presence, things will be ironed out. You could cross-check with the people I have mentioned I will bring them in the delegation, the true facts.

I am sure, Mr. President, some people within that Secretariat do not wish you well, at least in Benue State. I am capable of containing the situation but I am fed up with outside interference from the National Secretariat on issues that do not concern them; so I will be highly obliged if a meeting could be fixed either on Thursday evening or Friday morning.

I sincerely thank you for your usual and seasoned support.

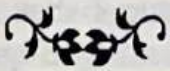
Yours very sincerely,
Aper Aku
Governor, Benue State

At a point, some Benue State indigenes based in Lagos, who were known as the 'Lagos Group', went to Makurdi and wanted to have a meeting with the governor alone. Chief Obande Obeya, former state chairman of the party in the state, was with them. They also included Sen. Suemo Chia, Shaahu, Hon. Padopads Awuna and Simon Shango, among others. They went with a view to influencing

things in their favour. By this time, Aku had actually taken control of the party structure in the state. Unfortunately for them, the group could not have their way as some of Aku's loyal lieutenants like Uji, Orkar, Dr. Orban Nyiakura, and others who were privy to the move resisted them.

Chapter

12



Politics of Economy and Treachery

The 1982 economic recession that hit Nigeria as a result of the oil glut left in its trail, scores of casualties. Apart from the fact that the political class indulged in what the military that seized power in 1983 described as 'profligacy' in their lifestyles, the states faced crunchy dwindling economic fortunes. Salaries of civil servants remained unpaid for months as a result of this. Capital projects also remained unattended to.

At the federal level, President Shehu Shagari took measures to curb the declining financial position of government. One of such measures by the President was through an "Enabling Bill" he sent to the National Assembly on Monday, April 19, 1982, to give him powers to promulgate an order to deal 'promptly and decisively' with the country's grave economic situation.

Nigeria's draft budget for 1982 was based on an estimated 1.3 million barrels of crude oil production per day at a price of $36.50 per day. Unfortunately, the nation's financial picture had become so serious that revised oil and non-oil revenue forecast for 1982 was ₦8.9 billion as against ₦11.6 billion giving a shortfall of ₦3 billion. At that time too, the oil market had deteriorated to the extent that market crude oil sold at $29 to $30 barrel.

Nigeria's economic crises had its genesis in the global economic and geo-political calculations of the major industrial nations that

wanted to break the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, OPEC, of which Nigeria was a member. Consequent upon this, crude oil production in Nigeria dropped from 1.75 million barrels per day in January to 688,000 per day in March 1982.

President Shagari told the lawmakers that the implication of this to the economy was that the country may be forced to keep to an average production rate of one million barrels per day instead of the 1.3 million barrels, which was Nigeria's official quota from the OPEC production ceiling and which was projected in the 1982 budget. As part of the measures that were taken by government through the Central Bank, he said stringent measures must be taken in view of the deterioration in the oil market.

On May 7, 1982, President Shagari sent a letter to the President of the Senate, Dr. Joseph Wayas, seeking the approval that political office holders' salaries be slashed by 12.5% until the economy of the country improves. This was to take effect from April 1, 1982. Such a sacrifice by the affected officers, said the president, would be necessary in view of the economic situation in the country. He also announced a five percent cut in estacode rates, while overseas allowances for members of the executive were to be reduced to the 'barest minimum.' Part of the measures was the reduction in the frequency of overseas conferences and their duration.

At that time, Theophilus Akinyele, presidential adviser on budget, predicted that by the end of the first quarter of 1983, Nigeria's economic woes would come to an end. He based his prediction on the measures that were taken so far by government, combined with expected increase in oil output later that year. He stated that during the 1983 fiscal year, the economy would grow at a relatively high rate of 5 per cent with government deficit drastically reduced. The expectations were still high when the military struck on December 31, 1983.

In Benue State too, Governor Aku took measures to address the dwindling financial fortunes of the state which was being used by the leading opposition party in the state, the NPP as a campaign issue. One of such measure was the increase in fees of post primary institutions in the state.

On Thursday, May 20, 1982, the governor, following from the decision of President Shagari at the federal level announced a slash in his salary, that of his deputy, Isa Odoma and all political appointees. Aku and Odoma's salaries were slashed by 20 and 15

per cent respectively while those of other appointees were slashed by 10 per cent. The contributions took effect from May 1982 and were to last for six months in the first instance. It was again extended for another six months. The state lawmakers too consented to contributing part of their salaries to the economic measures.

On Thursday, April 29, 1982, the governor addressed members of the Benue State Assembly on the State of Economy and sought their understanding in tackling the problem. He enumerated the strategies his administration had put in place in a bid to weather the economic crises that had engulfed the nation as a result of the oil glut. The address:

> Protocols;
> I wish to comment briefly to you on the topic that is very current with us in this country including this state–Benue State i.e. the economic situation. As you know, most of the revenue of this country is derived from oil. This administration is aware of the danger of such one line economy. That is why, since we assumed power in October 1979, we have been working hard to diversify the economy by establishing industries as well as commercial agricultural projects including agro-allied industries. It takes time for such projects to mature but many of them are underway.
>
> We, however, have been caught by general world economic recession which has adverse effect on the oil market thereby causing the oil glut. This caused reduction in production as well as the prices. As if this was not enough, the oil companies in Nigeria decided to cut down the production of crude oil and advised our customers to stop lifting crude until prices be reduced further.
>
> Needless to say that this conspiracy had adverse effect furthermore on our finances. On long term basis, many of our programmes have been affected. Many of our road projects have slowed down and some are yet to take off while our seven hospitals are yet to be completed. The work on the state secretariat has also been slowed down. Essentially we are working round the clock to ensure that

at least the salaries of federal government and local government staff are paid.

In fact, most federal or capital projects are almost, but not completely at a standstill. The cash flow is very scanty indeed. I wish to point out at this stage, that we have more respect for the CASH-FLOW that is what liquid cash we really have to spend, than for the provisions in the budget.

I wish to thank Mr. Speaker and the honourable House at this stage for showing understanding and cancelling for the time being, the seminar that the last batch of the members including Mr. Speaker himself was to attend in Pittsburgh this month.

I urge the house also to review the issue of school fees in boarding institutions since the failure to do so will make the implementation of our qualitative education impossible. I will, however, like to review the whole problem so that members can see the situation themselves.

When we took over the administration in October 1979, we discovered that there has been a drift to the detriment of the Government on the policy and practice of Government Grants to Non-Government owned schools. The official position was that Government officials were to assess the cost of:-

1. Construction of new buildings in any school that was approved for government grants. For any building approved, the proprietor was to go ahead and construct it and Government was to reimburse 50% of the feeding costs, this was referred to as "marching capitation grant."
2. Similarly, Government was to reimburse 50% of the feeding costs. This was referred to as "marching capitation grant."

In practice, long before we took over, because of the pressure from powerful private proprietors, advice from the experts of the ministry was ignored and proprietors were being paid their grants with no reference to their contribution once the school was approved for grants in

aid.

In fact, it became clear that proprietors were no longer required to contribute anything for the development of the institutions and government was footing all the bills before we took over. In fact, the role of the proprietor became that of the contractor for the school they built to be paid solely by the government. What is more, all the staff, teaching and non-teaching were being paid by the government.

It was for this reason that I sought to increase the power of control by the then State School Board, since only government was contributing financially and there was no marching financing from the proprietor. This was resisted strongly by the proprietors. The drift then continued as

(a) Financial position deteriorated and
(b) Expansion of institutions in numbers increased

It became clear that government could no longer foot the bills, while the proprietors believed that government has limitless money to continue to finance the schools in this manner.

As I speak now, the sum owed to various contractors and proprietors by the defunct States Schools Board arising from capital and capitation concept stand at about ₦35 million. The Ministry of Education is still computing the actual sum and as soon as the figure is ready I shall be sending it to the House for its consideration with proposals. This has arisen from faulty implementation of the education policy by the former administration and it took us some time to sort this out as no proper handing over notes were available.

It was in the wake of this realization that I bought the new education policy aimed at these facts that:

1. The government can no longer spend too much money per student as more and more children are now prepared for post-primary education.
2. Cost of living has increased considerably and it hits

the government as an institution too. Parents' contribution therefore has to increase.

3. Day school has to be encouraged in order to cut down the cost both on the part of government and that of the parents.

It is estimated that the number of students in post-primary institutions in Benue State by September 1982 will stand at about 150,000. The government, proposed contribution under the new policy of Marching Grant is estimated not on the basis of feeding and buildings. It is on the basis of a fixed sum per student. It is on the basis of a fixed proprietor to make up the difference that is needed both for capital and capitation. But we have taken into account the fact that if government does not put the ceiling on school fees, some proprietors would make the condition completely impossible. With the help of the field experts from the Ministry of Education, it is clear that the sum of ₦300 per child would be sufficient to maintain the child and the school in a year.

This means that a school of about 1,000 students, can have the income of about ₦300, 000 a year, of which about ₦100, 000 could be used for maintenance and physical development and the rest for feeding of the students.

It is this ₦300.000 that we are asking the parents to share with us and would like to put forward to you a new proposal which I believe considering the state of our national economy today you will not only approve, but also help or explain to the parents why they have to pay this amount of school fees.

(a) Boarding students in secondary schools

i. Parents	₦180.00
ii. Government	₦120.00
Total	₦300.00

(b) Day students in secondary schools

i. Parents	₦ 55.00
ii. Government	₦120.00
Total	₦175.00

(c) Boarding students training & technical colleges
   i. Parents ₦125.00
   ii. Government will pay the balance that is required by the college.

I wish to thank you for your co-operation and understanding. We shall strive together to excel despite the present situation of our educational system should continue to grow. I am determined that all the new Day Secondary Schools take off next September.

I am aware that we haven't tapped our revenue resources of areas such as sales tax and other items that are being explored and I shall be sending a Bill to the House for this purpose very soon. Registration of business premises is being worked out under an existing law. Such details on this will also be established. We have also appealed to local government metropolis to provide support for the collections of fees.

Let me seize this opportunity to congratulate the President Shehu Shagari for the swift action he has taken to try and control the economy of the nation. Let us stand behind him and I am urging, a little more determination on the part of all of us, we shall succeed. (*Nigeria Voice,* Saturday, May 1, 1982).

Aku's plea to review upward, fees in secondary schools received hard knocks from the legislators. The Benue general public too was sensitized to kick against this move. While some legislators had argued that parents should be made to pay the ₦120 per student in boarding schools, those that supported the increment of ₦180 had their way. The long standing disagreement between the lawmakers and the executive on this matter, however, came to an end on Tuesday, May 11, 1982. It was Speaker Num who saved the day for the executive. After the votes were taken, there was a tie of 23 votes each way. But Num voted in favour of the ₦180, thereby ensuring that the executive had their way.

A few weeks before the 1983 elections, Aku made a volteface on the payment of school fees he had presented to the state legislators state while on a campaign rally that he would abolish school fees in

the state if he were to be re-elected for a second term. This gesture, he emphasized, was to fulfil the promises the party made for free, functional and qualitative education in its second term. A Bill to that effect, he told the party supporters, was to be presented to the legislature.

Politics of Workers' Strikes in Benue

Towards the end of 1981, the financial squeeze in the country, occassioned in the drop in sales of oil at the international market, was beginning to bite hard. At that time too, the Benue State government like its counterparts across the country, was failing in meeting its obligations to workers. Salaries were owed the civil servants in arrears. This became a huge political capital by Aku's opponents. Strikes became a recurring decimal in the state with civil servants and teachers embarking on strikes without end. Ex-servicemen too had embarked on protests over the non-payment of their pension and Shagari awards. The delay in these payments was said to be the fault of the federal government, who failed to honour their own side of the obligation. Aku explained this as much when he addressed the State congress of the NPN on November 21, 1981. At some point, the national leadership of the Nigeria Labour Congress had to wade into the crises.

Aku told party members that the Benue State government was doing everything within its powers "to ensure that no group of workers suffers in the state. I know that in other states of the country, teachers have not been paid for more than four to six months. You can see that we have paid our teachers almost up to date. We are doing our best to make sure they do not suffer unduly," the governor explained.

At the 1982 May Day celebration, the governor gave a soul searching speech to the workers that everyone thought would make them to sheathe their swords and reconsider strikes as an alternative to their grievanaces with government. The speech, part of which is reproduced here was entitled: "The Choice Before Nigerian Workers", (*The Voice,* May 5, 1982:9) Aku said;

> In electing to speak on this topic, I have two alternatives. One is to sweet-talk our workers into believing that they are the greatest workers without a single fault. Or I can tell them the bitter truth

about their performances and seek to urge them to change for the better. I choose the latter alternative. In doing so, I seek not to condemn our workers but to draw their attention on this occasion to certain inherent faults in our work ethics which need to be urgently rectified in the interest of our national development.

These faults derive from a wrong perception of our role as workers and our place in the society. In the first place, Nigerian workers tend to look at themselves as working for government. It is not uncommon to hear people in public offices loudly declining to do the job for which they are employed and paid on the grounds that it is not their father's work. This means that no one need be dedicated to government work since apparently; government work is no one's work. This is a wrong perception. Workers who hold this attitude, and one must admit they are many, contribute to the declining productivity particularly in the public sector.

I am sure no one here will deny that productivity in the public sector of our economy is very low. This is not to say that it is significantly better in the private sector. The slight improvement in the private sector, however, derives from a certain sense of insecurity in an economic sector, recognised by all of us as profit oriented. Thus, the non-productive worker in the private sector is more likely to be sacked than his counterpart in the public sector.

It is ironic that the sense of security guaranteed by the public sector tends to bring the worst rather than the best in our workers. I urge that we reverse this trend. Let us recognise government work as our work. Let us also remember that those who govern are workers just as the governed are.

After all, the workers themselves gave those who govern the job to govern through the ballot box. The government of any country is, therefore, in the hands of the workers in both the private and public sectors, we cannot run away from this fact and the responsibility it entails.

In saying so, let me draw the attention of our workers to two rather contentious issues, namely, strikes and the over-reliance on monetary rewards as the index of our social progress.

Every government, or at least, every government in the free world, recognises the right of workers to fight for their welfare with their employers. This right is inalienable.

Government which deny workers this right infringe on workers' fundamental human rights. And they deserve to be condemned.

It has however, become a matter for regret that the right given to workers in democratic countries to fight for their welfare appears today to have been turned into a license by workers to destroy the society which they themselves are seeking to build.

It is partly for this reason and partly for the selfishness and unpatriotic posture of some of our labour leaders that our workers now resort to strike actions at the slightest provocation. Yet, it cannot be said too often. A strike action should be the last resort in the workers fight for their right.

I would like to believe that our workers fully recognise the disruptive effect of strike actions on the economy and welfare of the nation. This being so, it is my considered view that strike actions, in the final analysis do no one, including the workers themselves, much good. Because what the workers gain in the resolution of their grievances, they lose in the injury they inflict on their families and the society.

I wish to urge our labour leaders to re-examine their role today and see whether or not their behaviour is in the positive or negative direction of our national development. If we must obtain the best from our workers, their leaders must appreciate their leadership role in a developing economy. Workers and governments do not have divergent interests. The goals they seek and pursue, namely, a rapid socio-economic development of the society, are mutual and should be so recognised by everyone.

Our workers have tended to regard monetary rewards as the ultimate goal in everything they do. This has led to many crippling strike actions and the revision upwards of workers' salaries. Today, it is evident that these generous financial rewards given to workers by government have not made any significant differences in the purchasing power of the individual worker.

If anything, they appear to be worse off. Let us today, as workers re-examine the values we place on money in the provision of our individual and collective service. It is my considered view that the expectation of a monetary reward should be secondary to the fight for our welfare.

Let us first seek to serve our society faithfully and selflessly. Let us seek to put service to our nation above personal, financial and other rewards. It is only when we have changed this attitude that we can begin to build a healthy nation in which the value of human life and service are rightly placed above that of money.

Our re-examination of our attitudes to work has become particularly important in these difficult times for the nation. As you are all aware, the Federal Government had been compelled by the exigencies of our present financial problems to take certain necessary measures designed to revamp the nation's economy. These measures and their success or failure will test the level and degree of our patriotism.

If we see them as punitive measures for workers, they will fail and our nation will be the worse for it.

On the other hand, if we rightly see them as measures taken in the overall interest of our nation, then they will succeed.

These difficult times call for personal sacrifices of all Nigerians in the private and public sectors of our economy. We must realise that the ultimate goal of government is not to choke the people with material luxury but rather the development of a nation in which the growth of the individual character and the improvement in the quality of life are paramount.

I wish to take this opportunity to impress on our workers the fundamental lesson of these difficult times, namely, it is time to change our attitude to our nation; it is time to change our individual conception of our role as workers; it is time to demonstrate our genuine commitment to the welfare of our nation."

Aku's disposition in tackling the dwindling financial fortunes of the state did not impress the state civil servants. Or maybe, because of the external influence from the opposition party, the NPP. Even his speech at the 1982 May Day celebration failed to make much impact on them. On Tuesday, July 19, 1983, two top officials of the NLC, led by its former General Secretary, Dr. Lasisi Osunde, and the general secretary of the Customs and Excise, Immigration Staff Union, Bernard Odulana, arrived Makurdi to mediate in the strike by civil servants in the state.

The duo's visit to Makurdi was at the behest of the Central Working Committee of the NLC. They were asked to implore all workers across the states to stay action on any strike action till the end of July of 1983. The reason for this was to allow the national body to push forward an agreement earlier reached with the states to implement the income policy guidelines on minimum wage and pay all arrear of civil servants by the end of July of 1983. The argument of the NLC hierarchy was to the effect that this would allow the states time to act before any strike action could be taken if they fail to do so.

Osunde refused to be drawn into the merits or demerits of the workers' strike in the state when asked to comment. He had maintained, during the meeting with labour leaders in the state, that it was imperative for them to abide by the decision of the national body of the NLC so as not to pre-empt the intentions of the umbrella body in dealing with the protracted face-off between workers and government across the country.

S.J.I. Akure and Godwin Daboh's Allegations Against Aku

Governor Aku was still battling with building public confidence in his policy drive to boost the economic fortunes of the state when another deadly political blow hit him. And this was in the run up to the 1983 polls.

On Tuesday, 7th September, 1982, S.J.I. Akure deposed to a sixteen point affidavit alleging gross financial misdeeds against the governor. It was to deflect Aku's ambition for a second term. And it gained some level of acceptability because of Aku's image as an anti-corruption crusader.

Insider sources said that apart from acting a script, Akure who retired from the services of the Benue State government as a permanent secretary may have harboured some grudges against Governor Aku because of perceived victimization.

Before the Aku administration took over in 1979, there was a panel set up to probe certain government transactions in the state. It was a result of this that Akure was reitred as permanent secretary, following recommendations from panel of inquiry. This was on the eve of Aku's take-over of government. There were insinuations that Akure actually wanted Aku to save him from the outcome of the

investigative panel that indicted him. But Aku's credentials as an anti-corruption crusader before he came to power guided his approach to the issue. Even some of the governor's close associates reasoned that it will not be in the best interest of the regime to tamper with the findings of a judicial commission. The commission made findings, followed due process and a white paper was issued. It was the thinking of those in government then that Akure had the opportunity to defend himself while the proceedings of the panel lasted. And that it would have been counterproductive for the new government that came in with the posturing of anti-corruption credentials to start to subvert the course of justice.

Another sore point insiders claim may have influenced Akure to take up a fight against the former governor was that, before Aku was sworn-in in 1979, Akure, who was on a trip overseas, bought a suit for Aku. It is alleged that Akure wanted Aku to wear the suit on the day of swearing-in. "Of course, Aku didn't tell him no, but he did not wear it," one of the former governor's close confidants told the author.

In fact, Governor Aku had mentioned to some of his close aides long before the day of swearing in that he wanted to appear in Tiv traditional dress on that day. For that reason, there was no way he could have worn the suit bought for him by Akure. In any case, they said when he put on the suit, the hands were a little too long. He didn't find it appropriate. Besides, formal wears were not part of his dress sense. But all of this was not known to Akure who was obviously disappointed and he told Aku that much. The governor was said to be shocked and wondered what was special about the suit that it became a crime. He also told some of his aides what Akure said. But Aku never knew that what he did was enough to stoke malice in anyone.

Another reason, which many assume made Akure to take arms against Aku, was that when he (Akure) wanted to come into the NPN, he preferred to come in from the top. Governor Aku was said to have told him to go back to his local government and start from the ward level up. Of course, he could not gain access with the likes of Awuhe Ikyongo and Isaac Shaahu who did not trust him. With this, it was easy for him to become Aku's enemy automatically. From this point, he was always at the centre of anti-Aku stories and sentiments.

Akure denied all of this. He said it was not because of the suit

that he waged war against Aku. He admitted that he gave Aku a gift but that "it was entirely up to him to accept or reject. It was given in very good faith. He was under no obligation whatsoever to wear the suit on the day of his inauguration or not. Besides that, this was not in any way meant to be a public affair. It was simply a private affair between me and Aper Aku. Unfortunately, that suit was bought in England. I think when I was purchasing that suit, one or two people were with me and they simply asked the question. Very innocently, I said oh no, it was a gift for Aper Aku. That was as far as it went. I never held anything against him for not using a gift that I gave him at a particular time, neither do I say he was under any obligation whatsoever to make use of a gift I gave him," Akure explained in an interview with the author before he passed on.

In retrospect, he acknowledged that Aku performed creditably but one of his undoing was in the area of information dissemination. "Probably if the outfit that (Aper) Aku put together, to deliver information to the people were properly handled, we could have had a better understanding of his administration. This wasn't the case. So a lot of the policies that he embarked upon were either misunderstood or not properly articulated to give real meaning to the people of Benue State."

Akure went further to say that Governor "Aku's aides did not make any definitive effort to integrate other people's opinions "and from all points of view, it did appear as if that was one-sided. I do believe that if proper information was disseminated and integrated, history would have given him a better position than it did at that time. Looking at his performances as compared to other governors, I will say that he was well ahead. He knew what he wanted. He wanted development for his state. Whether he went about it the proper way or not to achieve maximum results, it's another matter. You cannot deny him the fact that he did try his best, better than most of his successors in office today," he told me in an interview.

Much of the anti-Aku stance by Akure could also be gleaned from a handwritten letter Godwin Daboh wrote to Governor Aku. It was dated October 13, 1981. From the tone of this letter, there were some issues between Akure and Aku that were unknown to outsiders. This may be how Daboh was called in to 'mediate.' But his efforts did not pay off. His earlier appointment to meet with Governor Aku proved futile. And so Daboh wrote:

Your Excellency,

I called in connection with Mr. Akure's complaint that you have been interfering with his efforts to earn a living. We called together but you said you had a budget meeting and did not know when it would end.

You will recall you gave me 11am appointment this morning at 7.30am. I am particularly worried about your letter of August 4, 1981 to the Federal Government requesting that he be removed from the F.C.L.A.A.C. of which he was appointed a member without consultation with your government. Mr. Akure even told me you wrote a reminder. The letter was written to the Minister for FCDA and copied to the office of the President.

Since I have not had the opportunity to discuss the matter in detail with you, I have only heard Mr. Akure's side of the story and cannot help but feel that he had so much battering that he should be left alone.

We came together to see you and sort out things but, as you stated, you were unable to see us. I told your ADC to tell you and I repeat that Mr. Akure has told me to plead with you that he should be left ALONE.

I can't wait any longer so I am returning to Lagos. I have been paid by Mr. Onoja.
Thanks and God bless.

Yours sincerely,
Akpenlamen Daboh

Daboh even ended his handwritten note to Governor Aku with some kind of threat when he wrote in a foot note: "P.S Mr. Akure has said if he was not left alone, the consequences may be grave for everybody..." Whatever that meant!

Whatever may have transpired between Aku and Akure was possibly not resolved or not to the satisfaction of the latter. This was how the tone for the "grave consequences" was set to unfold between them.

The Petition

Akure claimed that his sixteen point affidavit at the Makurdi High Court was not against Governor Aku but was to restrain the NPN from re-nominating him as the party's candidate for governorship in 1983.

He had alleged, among other things, that the governor stole over ₦16.5 million of public funds and stashed same in some local and foreign banks. In a sworn affidavit, Akure, who was himself a member of the Benue NPN wing of the party, alleged:

(a) That the governor lodged in account No. 9274810 at the Bank of Tokyo Ltd. 31/33 Martin Street, Lagos, the sum of ₦4 million.
(b) ₦7 million at the Barclays Bank International Ltd. P.O. Box 1022 Eleheria Square, Nicosia, Cyprus in his account No. 2249-917.
(c) The governor was also said to have deposited the sum of ₦3 million in another account No. 21856028 at the Allied Irish Bank Ltd., 12 Street Stephen's Dublin and ₦2.5 million at the Union Bank of Nigeria 131 Broad Street, Lagos was; deposited in the governor's account.

The affidavit further stated that Governor Aku awarded, or caused to be awarded to one Mr. Atetan, a contract No. 9753486 for some work to be done in the Makurdi Government House and the sum of ₦500.000.00 was allegedly paid to the contractor without any work done at the instance of the governor.

According to Akure, Aku bought and distributed 30 motor vehicles to his supporters in order to ensure that he was re-nominated. He further alleged that Aku connived with some contractors or companies in the name of Midobem Farm Industries Ltd., Gaadi and Sons Industries (Nig.) Ltd.; Mr. Obande Obeya; Itam Construction Ltd., Ankpa; Isa Obaje Enterprises Idah, to loot and empty the Benue State Treasury.

Other irregularities that Akure alleged were :-

(a) A five tone tipping trailer was purchased for Mr. Obande Obeya on invoice No. UA/SEO/MA-85/0155/52 on LPO 09708 issued on 10/5/82 involving

the sum of ₦8, 848.64.

(b) A Fiat 682 T3 A/C No. 120032 was issued to AC Isah Obaje-Enterprises Idah on invoice No.UA/SEO/MA-05/0842 issued on 15/3/82 involving the sum of ₦3, 496.00.

Akure insisted that, as a member of the NPN, he had vested interests in the preservation of the good reputation and integrity of the party. And as a citizen, he contended that the nomination or re-nomination of Aku on the platform of the NPN to contest the forthcoming elections for the office of the governor of Benue State would adversely affect his right and interest as a taxpayer in the state.

These allegations came at the time when there was general economic crises in the country arising from oil glut at the international market. The federal government and states began to owe workers salaries for months. Most developmental projects too were stalled. Both the federal and Benue State governments took some far reaching economic measures to reduce huge government expenditures. For a start, salaries and allowances of political office holders were reduced.

Chief Daboh also swore to and filed two petitions vide suits No. MD/64/82 and MD/66/82 before a Makurdi High Court against the National Party of Nigeria, NPN and 6 others "to stop them from allowing Aper Aku to participate in the exercise for the selection of a candidate for the office of Governor of Benue State on its platform."

Yima Sen, who had just resumed duties as the new Director of Information, dismissed both Akure and Daboh's affidavits. He said the allegations were baseless. And as it turned out, the allegations were false, as all the bank account details publicized were those of an international news magazine.

Sen came out with a terse press statement. He said, "The contents of the application filed in the High Court of Benue State by Mr. S.J.I. Akure and Daboh are bizarre, malicious, wicked and a piece of fiction, clandestinely supported by unpopular, desperate and inconsequential political elements. The false allegations by Akure, who featured prominently in the Justice Ogebe Commission of Inquiry, are mainly aimed at stopping Mr. Aper Aku from contesting the 1983 elections. Ultimately, this manoeuvre aims at causing confusion, creating darkness, and bringing untold hardship and suffering to the people of Benue State, who massively supported

Governor Aku. All the good citizens of Benue State, who are interested in the progress of the state, have nothing to worry about and there is no cause for alarm," the director concluded.

Aku reacted personally. At a well attended press conference he addressed on September 19, 1982, just before he left Makurdi for Lagos to attend the Council of States meeting, Aku denied that he had such amount of money. He insisted that "those who know me well know that I have always had contempt for money for its own sake." He then asked, "What could I possibly intend to do with such huge sum of money when the vast majority of people whom I have served all my life are still wallowing in ignorance and disease, squalour and when they have no adequate water supply, food and shelter and when I am having difficulty in paying teachers' salary, contractors and other workers in Benue State?"

He denied emphatically that he had any account in the Union Bank of Nigeria, located at 131 Broad Street, Lagos; Bank of Tokyo Limited, 31/33 Martin Street, Lagos; Barclays Bank International Limited, with business address at Elecheria Square, Nicosia, Cyprus; Allied Irish Bank Limited, 12 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin, as alleged by Akure. The governor insisted that he had never travelled to Cyprus or to the Republic of Ireland as alleged. He then asked, 'How then could I have opened an account in Nicosia in Cyprus or Dublin in the Republic of Ireland? Governor Aku said anyone with any proof to deflate his claim should publish it in all or any of the news media in this country.

He went on, "I hereby publicly authorize any of the above stated Banks or any bank at all either in or outside Nigeria where I have deposit of anything near fifty thousand naira to publish the account in all or any of the Nigeria news media. If they require any further authority for such publication, I hereby solemnly undertake to give it either on public or private request from such a bank. As a matter of fact, I have no bank account anywhere outside this country."

Additionally, Aku volunteered to surrender himself as the first public official to be the scrutinized by the Code of Conduct Tribunal, as soon as the Act was passed and the Tribunal began sitting. He added, "and if found guilty, I urge it to exercise all the powers vested in it by Section 20 of Part 1 of the Fifth Schedule."

To him, the allegations that he had stashed 16.5 million naira in foreign accounts reminded him of the missing 2.8 billion hoax. He affirmed that all the allegations both in Akure and Daboh's

applications are as false as the 16.5 million naira hoax."

Another allegation by Akure which Aku dismissed was that he had purchased 30 motor vehicles for the purposes of his re-nomination campaign. In fact, Aku admitted that 14 vehicles were bought by his government for security purposes and directed anyone not convinced to cross-check the registration of the vehicles with the Vehicle Licensing Office.

He said the charges constituted a serious threat, not only to his government but also, to the stability of the entire nation and called on the security agencies to step into the matter and conduct a thorough investigation of all the allegations. The governor described the writ of summons against the NPN as mischievous and wicked and obviously designed to incite the Nigeria populace against the civilian administration of the Second Republic.

Aku noted that the petition against him was a product of Benue's prolonged and bitter struggle for certain geo-political groups for self determination within the pluralistic and colonially established Nigerian nation. The initial success of this struggle manifested itself in the creation of the old Benue-Plateau State. Incidentally, when Aku returned to the state, there was a large turnout of party supporters across the state that turned out to receive him.

But the media was not impressed with Aku's response to the matter. Two days after Aku's denunciation, the *National Concord* in its September 22, 1982, edition came out with a strong front page editorial titled "Aper Aku's Case: A matter of probity" and accused the governor of dodging the issue involved and merely appealing to sentiments. The paper said "the charges are specific and clear. A leading member of his own party (NPN) swore to an affidavit making what the governor himself saw as serious charges of gross misconduct and abuse of office. Rather than address himself to those charges, the Chief Executive of Benue State sought to obfuscate issues by appealing to sentiments."

The newspaper said it was wrong for Governor Aku to attempt to hoodwink the Nigerian public by introducing "a red herring into an unequivocal issue." It reasoned that, for the governor to have challenged anyone who wishes to go to his banks and get details of his account, the governor was "being clever by half," realizing that "no bank in Nigeria would make available to a third person, the details of anybody's account without a court order."

In view of the paper, if Aku was determined to clear his name,

he was the only person that could make the details of his account public. The paper then urged the governor to obtain his own bank statements and publish them, since it was reasoned as the only option. It said the "governor's handling of his own defence suggests that having in the past been at the giving end, he is a poor receiver of what he chooses to dismiss as blackmail. Governor Aku should not have a short memory. How on earth could the governor have the moral right to attack the press for publishing the charges leveled against him?" the paper queried.

When Governor Aku accused the Nigerian mass media of taking sides in his face-off with Akure, there was a general feeling of let-down by the media. Senior journalists and columnists reminded him that it was the same press that he was seeking to vilify that defied a military administration to publish what he (Aku) had to say against a sitting military governor even when little or nothing was known about him.

The general feeling was that if Aku, the erstwhile anti-corruption crusader, were to live up to his expectations he should have opted out of office to create a conducive atmosphere for proper probe into the allegations. This was part of an editorial by the defunct *National Concord*. The paper said if that had happened, "that could have been the Aper Aku of Aku-Gomwalk fame who, under the military, took the risk with the support of the press and the ovation of the students' population to fight alleged corruption. Governor Aper Aku ought to be the first among the state governors to take the plunge. And why not? It is all a matter of probity in public office. A cause which Aku pursued most vigorously only a couple of years ago."

With this weighty allegation at a time the entire nation was going through a financial crunch, the atmosphere in Benue State was tense. There was this mixed bag of feelings among party supporters across the three leading parties in the state, namely: NPN, NPP and UPN. And so, as the media trial lasted, the NPP, the number one foe of the NPN in Benue led by the firebrand and charismatic politician, Unongo, the party was endlessly jubilant and animated about the case. The UPN waited for the outcome of the judgment with reserved optimism. But the NPN in a self restrained manner, stuck to its "we must win" confidence.

Governor Aku's media trial was not yet over. Mohammed Haruna, writing in the *New Nigeria* of 22nd October, 1982, under the caption:

"Aper Aku: A Party's Big Dilemma" said that even though, it would seem, that Aku had been vindicated on his contention that Mr. Akure's allegations were baseless, it was not an entirely legal matter. "There is obviously a political aspect to it as the courts did argue. The obvious outcome is that Aku is now free to contest for the gubernatorial ticket of his party. The courts might have exonerated him but he still remains unclean in the eyes of many, not because Akure's charges are true but because they have not been proved to be untrue."

Haruna refused to be swayed by the argument of the governor that Akure's law suit was politically motivated. He even trivialized Aku's arguments. According to the columnist, he had reservations about the interpretation of Mr. Akure's action as something aimed, not at Mr. Aku as such, but at the NPN.

> As it were, it is even conceivable that the action was taken to save the state for the NPN. This, however, is another matter altogether. For now, we will concern ourselves only with the argument about the centrality of Benue State to the success of the NPN in next year's elections. Mr. Aku says it is the most central, forming as it were, the wedge between two NPP states, Anambra in the South and Plateau in the north."

Again, I have my doubts. Benue State is no doubt a very important state for the NPN. For one thing, its people voted solidly for NPN in the last elections. Secondly, governor Aku has for quite a while appointed himself the spokeman of the "minorities" and this group was the backbone of NPN's success in 1979. So the loss of such a state to the NPN will be a serious blow.

Yet, it can hardly be as serious a blow as the loss of Sokoto State (the President hails from there), Kaduna (the power base of the influential and so-called "Kaduna Mafia"– a group which remains a powerful element in NPN, even though right now it is not calling the shots) and Niger State, for the most vital party and federal government functionaries come from the state. To wit, Alhaji Suleiman Takuma, NPN General Secretary, Alhaji Shehu Musa. The Federal Government Secretary and the Ministers of Police Affairs (the police, remember, is crucial for the conduct of elections and Information, Alahji Ndagi Mahmudu and Malam Garba Wushishi. This is perhaps the single most influential combination of party and government offices any state can hope

for. So perhaps if any state is right now critical for the image of the NPN as a party not to be trifled with. It is Niger State.

Unlike Mr. Aku, therefore, I would have thought that Niger State, would be the first and most important port of call for anyone wanting to cause mischief for the NPN. He would also probably call at Sokoto and Kaduna States first before heading for Benue. This is one good reason why I would hesitate to buy Mr. Aku's argument that he was not the real target of Mr. Akure's action. But there are other reasons.

The only explanation, therefore, must be that Mr. Akure's action is aimed at stopping Mr. Aku from being returned as the NPN's gubernatorial candidate. You may say that Mr. Akure's is a rather vicious and dangerous way to fight an opponent. There is, afterall, a possibility that it could backfire. However, from information I was able to gather in Makurdi, it seemed Mr. Aku's opponents didn't have much of a chance otherwise. And some of my sources could hardly be regarded as the governor's enemies. The picture I came away with, was that the governor had come to regard the party as his exclusive turf and regarded its officials accordingly. An example often quoted to prove the point was the reported manner in which the party was making it difficult, if not impossible, for Mr. Aku's rivals to collect and file in their nomination papers.

Haruna said some of the governor's rivals whom he spoke to while in Makurdi, including Akure, had other unprintable reasons to give for the court action against the governor. He admitted that he was unable to establish the veracity, or otherwise, of such reasons because as he puts it,

The governor himself would not talk to me on the matter. The State Director of Information, Mr. Yima Sen had arranged for me to see him at his residence. But when he refused to be drawn on the matter I took it that it was because his lawyers had advised him against speaking to the press even in confidence, since that could become charges of contempt.

But when he went to Lagos and addressed a press conference on the matter and the courts did not raise any objections, I thought he must have had other reasons. Later, I found out that he did not want to talk to me because his intelligence people had told him that a relation of his that he suspected has a hand in Mr. Akure's

> action, put me up in a hotel and also that I had been to talk to his Deputy, Mr. Isa Odoma, who I hear is not the governor's best of friends, and also that I had been to see Mr. Akure. I could then hardly resist the conclusion that he must carry the blame for some of his travails.

Maybe Haruna was speaking the mind of many who wanted Aku out by all means. He insisted that, notwithstanding the court judgement that exonerated the governor, Aku may prove a liability to the party. Haruna reasoned that it was a dangerous gamble for the NPN to return Aku as its candidate for the 1983 elections because, as he put it, the party risked losing Benue State. In otherwords, Aku should have been jettisoned or the NPN risked giving the impression that it condones corrupt officials. But as it turned out, Haruna himself was guilty of following the wind by insisting Akure was right just because Akure said so. At the end, Aku came out clean as the said account numbers were those of an international news magazine.

Toryima Orga, Aku's Special Adviser on Economic Matters, took on Haruna over his diatribe against the governor. In a response published in *New Nigerian* newspapers of Thursday, November 4, 1982, Orga accused Haruna of pitching his tent on the side of the governor's opponents simply because they "failed to get a court verdict in their favour and now wants to change the rules. Now he wants the courts rather than find Aku guilty to find him innocent. Foul!"

It was in the opinion of Orga that "the duty of the Nigerian court is to establish guilt not to prove innocence" as Haruna portrayed in his article because "there is no need for him to undermine the public faith in the judiciary with careless talk and personal prejudices. On a broader scale, we know that in many ways, a public office in Nigeria is a high risk, a thankless job. Accusations of tribalism and dishonesty can be hurled at anyone." The least public opinion moulders like Haruna would have done, Orga reasoned, "was to discourage the public from assuming public officers are guilty once accused or unless proved innocent."

But Haruna hit back. He wrote: "I did not say Governor Aper Aku was guilty. What I said was that the court had not proved him innocent which is not the same thing as saying he is guilty. If Mr. Aku himself believed the court had exonerated him, he would not

have sued Mr. Akure, the *Standard* and Akure's lawyer for libel following the court judgement."

Haruna was again taken to task by another supporter of Aku, John Agi, who contended that Haruna's articles failed completely to analyze the motives of the people that made the allegations against Aku, the timing as well as the method of the allegations. As he put it, "one sees that the postulates in the article are devoid of systematic analysis and rationality."

Agi reminded Haruna of the challenges of governing a state, particularly Benue that was one of the most under-developed states of the federation when Aku took over in 1979. "It is not possible to believe that the dispute between the Governor of Benue State and the initiators of the allegations is simply about the interpretation of the NPN's constitution or of some particular aspect of government policy. The basis for the allegations is, therefore, wanting. The events are taking place at a time when a severe recession has hit the national economy to the point of causing difficulties in the implementation of governmental programmes. The difficulties have been aggravated by a sharp fall in the sale of our major export commodity, oil."

Agi noted that although Haruna's article spoke in glowing terms about the persons who had accused Governor Aku, and the article also retained a great affection for them, the question of whether and if any of the other aspirants could perform better than the incumbent governor, given the peculiar circumstances of Benue State was completely ignored. He wondered why Haruna's article denied the existence of any development in the state since the governor assumed office in 1979 and took all its assumptions as proved but went ahead to eulogize the opponents of the governor.

Another great difficulty with the article, Agi noted, was that it contained several 'dogmatic statements' and based its conclusions upon faulty assumptions. "It is well known that Benue State, from the time it was created to the time the pre-civilian administration took over its governance, was one of the most under developed states in the federation," Agi stated.

On another plane, Agi explained that the difficulties encountered in the implementation of the educational policy, as it relates to the development of secondary schools and other related institutions in the state have been brought about by inadequacy of resources emanating from the nationwide recession. It is important, however, to note that these developments took place in an area where

enrolment in schools is quite high."

One would have taken Governor Aku's rivals and critics seriously if they had tried to evolve an alternative approach or a new model in the pursuit of development. On the basis of the available published material, it was certain that the criticisms and rivalries were the results of a desire to achieve personal political gains. But a similar process of deduction, impatience and the desire to exercise power by all means seems to be the root causes of the problem rather than inspiration to help the poor, through a new technique, in their difficulties caused by the recession.

The problem with Haruna's conclusions in the article was staggering because it failed to rely on historical facts in its treatment of the issues and personalities. Accordingly, the article failed to perceive the aspirations of rival political particles in a democratic system.

In Governor Aku's cabinet, there was a noticeable lone crack. Mvendaga Jibo, who was then Commissioner for Health, swallowed the allegations in the petition and would want that the governor resigned. His colleagues cautioned him against any hasty decision but he would not heed their counsel.

Interestingly, Jibo's appointment into Aku's cabinet was said to have been met with stiff opposition from the likes of Hon. Benjamin Chaha, then a member of the House of Representatives. Aku prevailed on Chaha to let Jibo be. At the beginning, many thought Jibo would make the list of federal appointments, having worked on the presidential election team. But insiders claim that President Shagari was said to have told Aku that he will not be able to accommodate Jibo in his cabinet for reasons he would not disclose. Jibo was young but too independent minded for President Shagari, or so it seemed.

And of course it was unrealistic to think that Shaahu would be dropped for him. But most importantly, others argue that Jibo's stance on the knotty issue of Sharia at the Constituent Assembly in 1977 may have pitched him against the northern establishment and that may have influenced Shagari's decision.

Jibo had sought the opinion of a fellow commissioner in the cabinet, Vincent Uji, and asked him what he thought of the affidavit. Uji was said to have dismissed the affidavits, saying it was "nonsense." Jibo was shocked at Uji's response. To him, the account numbers had proved that Aku was guilty and should resign. He was said to be convinced that Uji dismissed the issue simply because

he was one of those loyal to the governor who would not see anything wrong in the actions of the governor. Unknown to Jibo, the account numbers that were used in the petition belonged to *Newsweek* international news magazine.

Jibo resigned from Aku's government because, according to Kpamor J.T. Orkar, whom he confided in, he would not want his name to be smeared. Jibo spoke much on this again when he granted an interview to *New Nigerian* newspapers of December 31, 1982.

Asked why he resigned his appointment from the Aku government, Jibo said he did so "on principle." He was uncomplimentary on Aku and went on to say he was disillusioned with the state government and the NPN as a party. Jibo painted the picture of an infallible human being. Pressed further, he intoned, "If I had remained in Aku's government my image would have been damaged so I had to check out." (NNN: 31/12/1982).

Jibo also criticized the reintroduction of fees in state primary schools. He said it was not necessary. And that if the governor had re-ordered his priority, he would have ease of running the schools in the state without increasing the burden on parents. Jibo's conviction was to the effect that the only way Aku could redress such imbalance and reduce the pains on parents was to drop the Green Revolution programme, which the party had adopted as a national policy, and spend the money ear-marked for it on educating the children.

He claimed that the state government could successfully make education free if it had the will to do so. He went further: "please tell Governor Aku not to toy with the education of our children." He said education is a right that should be protected by the government adding: "any government that is serious in Nigeria could successfully finance free education even at all levels."

Jibo also talked about his refusal to attend the NPN convention. His anger against a party he helped to build began in June of 1982, after the party's national convention that ratified President Shehu Shagari's nomination as the party's presidential candidate for the 1983 general election. He insisted "It was a Kangaroo convention which I disagreed with and non attendance of those following would amount to endorsing the convention," he said.

He told his colleagues that he had served the administration but the moment this happened, he must resign. He carried out his threat and resigned without meeting with the governor who was away in

Lagos on official duties to seek clarifications.

But unknown to others, Jibo was already nursing some resentment against the governor from the first minor cabinet reshuffle when commissioners were moved around. He was moved from Education to the newly created Ministry of Water and Electricity. He was said to have complained to close associates about the cabinet reshuffle.

Aku had the last laugh when the judgment was finally delivered. Justice Sylvester Onu, now a retired Justice of the Supreme Court, who presided over the case at the Makurdi High Court, was not impressed by what Akure presented to the court. He declared that Aku as a governor could not be sued. He invoked Section 308 of the Nigerian Constitution to stave the heat off Aku.

Besides, Justice Onu said that Akure "had no *locus standi*" in the suit, since among other things he (Akure) has not stated that he himself aspires to that office and that Aper Aku is a stumbling block." He then ordered Akure to pay the then Chairman of the NPN, Chief J.C. Obande, and State Secretary, Thomas Deggar, joined as Co-defendants a cost of ₦1,000.00 as damages.

Justice Onu held that the suit instituted by Akure against the party "is one of such that should not be allowed to achieve through the backdoor what he could not achieve through the front door". Justice Onu's selection and choice of language was clear. He said that "the entire suit was scandalous, speculative, frivolous, vexatious and solely intended to embarrass and defame the government of Mr. Aper Aku who is the subject matter of the suit but is not a party to this action."

Furthermore, the trial judge explained that the allegations of wrongdoings against Governor Aku had no legal backing since the plaintiff did not show that he was delegated by the Attorney-General to prosecute the allegations, contending that since the action of the plaintiff was founded on the constitution, principles and objectives of the NPN, the plaintiff ought to "either abide by the decision of the majority or clear out since it is a voluntary association."

The judge said that the issue of nomination or re-nomination of a gubernatorial candidate was purely a political matter, and explained that "the plaintiff is hiding under a cloak of civil suit to hammer Mr. Aku who is not a party to the action," and directed that "if you don't want to be in a political party, just go away."

Chief Fani Kayode, who led the legal team for Governor Aku had, among other submissions, said that the reliefs sought by the plaintiff were misconceived in that the grant or enforcement of such reliefs would violate the fundamental rights of Governor Aku who was not a party to the suit, adding that the plaintiff did not allege any legal disqualification by the constitution against Aku for nomination as party candidate or to be voted for as governor of Benue State.

But in his counter submissions, counsel for the plaintiff, George Uloko urged the court to hold that the allegations against Aku "if proved, will constitute a legal disqualification against him as contained in section 62(d) and 166(1) of our Constitution." He told the court that it was impossible for it "at this stage to decide whether or not the case has any chance of success since among other things, the allegations are to be investigated and determined on their merits.

Daboh's case was also struck out by Justice Onu. The judge noted that Daboh's motion was "inherently incompetent because it is frivolous and vexatious," stressing that the applicant/complainant did not initiate judicial proceedings against the purported accused persons/respondents in accordance with the law. He said the sanction of the court is *sine qua non* to the commencement of judicial proceedings such as the one Daboh had embarked upon, not certainly by way of motion on notice.

According to the trial judge, "the applicant/complainant has not sought and obtained such a sanction. Hence, the entire move by the applicant/complainant is, in my view, vexatious, frivolous and misconceived. He has not stated in his affidavit that in seeking to initiate these proceedings to which one may refer to as 'Criminal Contempt'; he is doing so on behalf of the Attorney-General. His act, therefore, can best be regarded as in the utter abuse of the process of this court. He is not asking for leave to bring action for contempt.

Secondly, Justice Onu was of the opinion that "trials by the High Court in Criminal Matters can only be commenced pursuant to Section 185 of the Criminal Procedure Code under the rules made thereto. In the matter before me, section 185 (c), in my view, is that which is relevant but as there is no charge preferred against the respondents before this court by, or on behalf of the applicant/complainant, this court will not *suo motu* frame one as it will be illegal so to do. I see in the motion before me despite all appearances

of formality and legality that it assumes, to be misconceived and an abuse of this court."

Thirdly, Onu accused Daboh of trying to "pre-empt" the court which "had already given him notice that he and another in suit nos: MD/64/82, MD/61/82 and MD/66/82 were, on a date to be notified, to be called upon to come forward to show cause why they should not be convicted for contempt in their publication of certain materials relating to the above cases and others beside. That action this court took yesterday culminating in applicants' conviction."

Daboh was not satisfied with the ruling of the Makurdi High Court and preceded on Appeal to the Kaduna Judicial Division. The case was yet to be disposed when the military struck in 1983.

Aku vs S.J.I. Akure, G.I. Uloko and Philomena Shillong

Aku was angry at these allegations. On December 8, 1982, S.J.I. Akure, G.I. Uloko and Philomena Shillong were arrested but later released. And so, to clear his name against Akure's allegations, Aku intimated President Shagari of his intention to seek redress in the court. Shagari said he would not stop him. Aku then filed a case at Makurdi High Court in Suit No: MD/6C/1983 against the trio for publishing false accusation of corruption contrary to Section 1(1) of the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Act No.11 of 1976. On March 16, 1983, the then Chief Judge of Benue State, Justice James Adesuyin, forwarded the case file to Justice James Ogebe, asking him when it would be convenient for him to try the accused. But in a swift response, on the same date, Ogebe acquitted himself in trying the case. He told the Chief Judge that the second accused, George I. Uloko, was his pupil when he served as a State Counsel and they worked closely together. For reasons of conscience, Ogebe submitted, "I will not like to try him. You may wish to re-assign the case."

Justice Adesuyin later re-assigned the matter to Justice Aloysius Katsina-Alu who, on April 15, 1983, assented to try the case. The trial could not even take-off as it was knocked-off at that preliminary stage. Eventually, Aku lost the case because it was not properly brought before the court. The three accused persons were subsequently discharged on May 20, 1983.

The accused persons were arraigned based on information containing 12 heads of charge. When the matter came on for hearing

on 15th April, 1983, Mathias Nwafor Chukwuma, learned counsel for 1st and 2nd accused persons, raised an objection on the following grounds:

1. That the 12 heads of charge have not been properly brought before this court.
2. That only the Attorney-General of the Federation can institute and undertake criminal proceedings against any person before any court of law in Nigeria other than a court-martial in respect of any offence created by or under an Act of the National Assembly.
3. That Adejo A. Ogiri, who is said to have given sanction for the prosecution of the accused person and in whose name this action has been instituted, is not and has not been the Attorney-General of Benue State.
4. That the accused persons plead absolute privilege.

On ground 1, Chukwuma submitted that the 12 heads of charge in a nutshell alleged only two offences. The first is False Accusation Against a Public Officer. The second is conspiracy to commit the first. These offences come under the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Act No 11 of 1976. Counsel pointed out that the first 7 heads of charge have been brought under the Act while 8th to 12th heads are under the Penal Code Law. He contended that if the trial were to proceed, the court would be limited to the offences allegedly committed under S.1 (1) of the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Act 1976. In support of this contention, Chukwuma cited S.2 (2) of the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Act and also S.24 of the Interpretation Act 1964.

In his reply, S.P. Ejale learned Solicitor-General of the state who stood in for the Attorney-General submitted that though offences may be similar, they could be charged together. He relied on S.230 of the Criminal Procedure Code. He also argued that S.24 of the Interpretation Act, 1964 talks about punishment after trial and not the trial itself.

As regards ground 2 of the objection, counsel for the accused persons submitted that "only the Attorney-General of the Federation can institute and undertake criminal proceedings against any person before any court of law in Nigeria other than a court-martial in

respect of any offence created by or under any Act of the National Assembly. All Decrees now Acts are deemed to have been creatures of the National Assembly and the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Act, 1976 is one of such." He referred to S.160 (1) (a) and also S.191 (1)(a) of the Constitution and submitted that the Attorney-General of Benue State has no power to bring heads 1 to 7 of the charge. He further argued that heads 8 to 12 use the words of the Act and in his opinion; "they properly come under the Act. The Attorney-General of this state had no power, therefore, to prefer also heads 8 to 12 of the charge against the accused persons."

In his answer to ground 2, Ejale was of the view that an Attorney-General of a state could prosecute offences under a National Act under delegated authority. He said that it was for the Attorney-General of the federation to complain and not anybody else. He said the presumption was in favour of the state Attorney-General that he had authority to prosecute.

On ground 3, Mr. Chukwuma said that Adejo A. Ogiri, who was said to have given sanction for the prosecution of the accused persons and in whose name the action was instituted, was not the Attorney-General of Benue State. He said that Ogiri was a civil servant up to the end of September, 1979. But by Benue State Notice No. 217 of 14th October, 1979, published on 29th November, 1979, through Benue State Gazette No. 56 Vol. IV, the Governor of Benue State under his hand conferred the post of a commissioner on Ogiri, effective 1st October, 1979. He stressed that the officer did not resign his appointment before the 1979 elections. Counsel cited S.173(4) of the Constitution and also S.73(1)(f) of the Electoral Act 1977 and submitted that Ogiri was not even qualified to contest election and consequently not qualified to be appointed a commissioner in Benue State.

The Solicitor-General punctured this submission, insisting it was raised "too late in the day" pointing out that "the matter should not have been raised orally. It should have been made in writing supported by an affidavit. He complained that the affidavits of the accused persons were served on him in court and, therefore, he had not enough time to check the records as to whether and when Ogiri resigned from his office as a civil servant. He further contended that the fact that the Attorney-General was bringing this action against the accused person is a mere technicality which can be

amended. He then made an oral submission and asked the court to delete the words "The Attorney-General, Benue State" and substitute in its stead the words "The State".

As regards ground 4 of his objection, counsel for the accused persons submitted that the proof of evidence filed discloses no offence committed by the accused persons. To Chukwuma, "what can be made out against the accused person from the proof of evidence is that they filed an action in court, and for this they plead absolute privilege. Chukwuma citied the English case of Munster v. Lamb (1881-1885) AIIER 791 at pages 796-797. He also referred 15 Clarke and Lindsell on Torts 14ED articles 1728 and 1729 at page 990." Ikongbeh, learned counsel for the 3rd accused person, associated himself completely with and adopted the submission of Chukwuma.

Ejela's reply to the submission of the defence counsels on this ground was that malice destroys privilege. He said it was the case of the prosecution that the accused persons maliciously distributed copies of the writ to the public before the case was filed. This, he contended was not a judicial act and urged that the objection be overruled.

Presiding High Court judge, Justice Katsina-Alu, began his ruling with ground 1 of the objection of defence counsel and proceeded in that order. He noted that it was suggested that by virtue of the provision of S.24 of the Interpretation Act, 1964, and S.2 (2) of the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Act, 1976 the prosecution would only bring charges under the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Act. The prosecution was barred from also bringing charges under the Penal Code Law. It was further postulated that where an alleged offender is charged under two or more enactments, then the charge is bad and it should in consequence be struck out. Section 24 of the interpretation Act, 1964 reads:

> Where an act constitutes an offence under two or more enactments or under an enactment and at common law, the alleged offender shall be liable to be prosecuted and on conviction punished under any one of the enactments or, as the case may be, either under the enactment or at common law but shall not be liable to be punished twice for the same offence.

Justice Alu said the submission of the defence counsel that the prosecution could prosecute an alleged offender under the enactment in circumstances envisaged by Section 24 quoted above appealed to him. And as he put it, "it seems to me that this is probably what the lawmakers intended it to be. Alu reasoned that "If this view is wrong, however, it does mean that the alleged offender can be prosecuted under two or more enactment but to be punished on conviction under any one of such enactments. What is the essence in going through the time consuming and energy sapping trial only to punish under one enactment?" Having said this, however, the presiding judge noted that "on a careful reading of S.24 it does appear that the restriction is only in respect of punishment after conviction. The words: "but shall not be liable to be punished twice for the same offence" indicate plainly that a trial must have preceded the punishment. Section 2(2) of the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Act, 1976 makes the position even more simple. It reads:

> Section 24 of the interpretation Act, 1964 (which among other things provides that a person shall not be punished twice where he is guilty of an offence under more than one enactment shall apply in respect of an offence under this decree.

A person cannot be said to be guilty of an offence until he has been tried and convicted. I am, therefore, unable to accept defence counsel's submission on this ground."

Alu went on: "The defence has said that only the Attorney-General of the federation can prosecute an alleged offender for Federal Offences. A Federal Offence has been defined as an offence contrary to the provision of an Act of the National Assembly or any law having effect as if so enacted. It has not been in dispute that the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Act, 1976 is an Act of the National Assembly. The powers of the Attorney-General of the federation are laid down in section 160 of the Constitution. sub-section (1)(a) and (2) provide as follows:

> 160-(1) the Attorney-General of the federation shall have power:
>
> (a) to institute and undertake criminal proceedings against any person before any court of law in Nigeria other than a court martial in respect of any offence created by or under any Act of the National Assembly,

> (b) the powers conferred upon the Attorney-General of the federation under sub section (1) of this section may be exercised by him in person or through officers of his department.

It will be seen that the Attorney-General of the federation may prosecute in person or through officers of his ministry. The Constitution has not made any provision under which he can delegate his powers to an Attorney-General of a state. I have not been referred to any authority nor have I personally come across any which says that he can so delegate. The powers of the Attorney-General of a state are also clearly spelt out under section 191 of the Constitution. His powers are limited to offences created by or under any law of the House of Assembly of that state. Any attempt by him to prosecute any offender for federal offences will, in my view, be *ultra vires* to his powers. As I stated earlier, the Attorney-General of the federation cannot delegate his powers under S.160 of the Constitution to an Attorney-General of a state and any such purported delegation will be null and void and of no effect. The effect of this is that the Attorney-General of Benue State cannot prosecute the accused persons under heads 1 to 7 of the charge which have been brought under the public officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Act, 1976.

According to Justice Alu, "It had also been said that Adejo A. Ogiri was a civil servant up to the end of September, 1979. He did not resign his appointment before the 1979 elections. He was, therefore, not qualified to be appointed a commissioner of the government of Benue State. Section 173 of the Constitution and section 73 of the Electoral Act 1977 were cited in support of this contention. Section 173-(4) of the Constitution provides:

> No person shall be appointed as a commissioner of the Government of a state unless he is qualified for election as a member of the House of Assembly of the State.

Section 73(1) (f) of the Electoral Act 1977 provides as follows:

> 73-(1) No person shall be qualified for election to any legislative for election to any legislative House or to the office of President or Vice-President or Governor or Deputy Governor of a State.
>
> (f) If he is a person employed in the public service of the federation

> or of any state or in a local Government service or statutory corporation or is employed as an officer in any legislative House, the Judiciary or the Armed Forces or the Nigeria Police Force or was such a person within a period of less than four months before the election: Provided if a person who holds office as a member of a statutory corporation, state-owned company or state-controlled company or a local government, is elected a member of any legislative House, he shall cease to hold office as a member of that corporation, company or local government.

Consequently, he declared that his attention was not drawn to any letter of resignation by Adejo A. Ogiri. "But it was argued on his behalf that resignation could be retrospective. The learned Solicitor-General was in some difficulty here. He was not certain of the facts and so embarked on speculations. One thing appears certain to me. It has not been seriously disputed that Adejo A. Ogiri was a civil servant up to September, 1979. This being so, it is quite plain that his appointment as a commissioner was not in accordance with the law which I have stated above. By implication, it was further argued that Adejo A. Ogiri's subsequent appointment as the Attorney-General of Benue State was not valid in law, section 176 sub-section (1) and (2) of the Constitution provides as follows:

> 176-(1) There shall be an Attorney-General for each State who shall be a Commissioner of the Government of that State.

> (2) A person shall not be qualified to hold or perform the function of the office of the Attorney-General of a State unless he is qualified to practice as a legal practitioner in Nigeria and has been so qualified for not less than 10 years.

"I have not been told that at the time of his appointment as the Attorney-General of Benue State, Adejo A. Ogiri had less than 10 years post Call experience as provided for in sub-section (2) above. Sub-section (1) on its part stipulates that there shall be an Attorney-General who shall be a commissioner of the Government of that State. One does not need a magnifying glass to see that the appointment as Attorney-General comes first. The defence argument that since Adejo A. Ogiri's appointment as commissioner was bad in law, his subsequent appointment as the Attorney-General is also

bad is, in my view, untenable. Plainly, this is putting the cart before the horse. It is the Attorney-General who shall also be a commissioner and not vice-versa. I, therefore, hold that Adejo A. Ogiri was the Attorney-General of Benue State at the time this action was filed."

"As regards the plea of absolute privilege, all I need say here is that it is premature to raise the issue before evidence is heard. One other vital issue which I have to resolve: The Attorney-General appears as the complainant and a party to this action. The question is: has the Attorney-General any *locus* to prosecute the accused persons in his own name? Ejale, the Solicitor-General, had argued that the fact that the action has been instituted in the name of the Attorney-General is a mere technicality which can be amended. He then applied orally to delete the words "the Attorney-General Benue State" and substitute with the words "The State".

"The inescapable conclusion or inference to be drawn from this was that the Solicitor-General discovered that a wrong party had brought the accused persons to court. The proper party, as he rightly indicates, was not the Attorney-General. Alu agreed with the defence lawyers, saying that, "only the state, or in the alternative an aggrieved person as the case may be, may bring this action. The Attorney-General in his official capacity may prosecute, in person or through officers of his ministry, the alleged offenders in the name and on behalf of the state. I, therefore, reject the Solicitor-General argument that the error in brining this is a mere technicality. The simple reason is that a wrong party has instituted this action against the accused persons, this, in my view, is fundamental for the reasons which I have given. The accused persons are hereby discharged."

Okpe defends alleged indebtedness the NPP did not relent in its attacks on the Aku administration. They made political capital on every issue. And the *Nigeria Standard* was again the executioner. For example, the paper had published that the state government indebtedness had piled up to ₦264 million.

Godwin Okpe, Commissioner for Finance, said in a statement he issued on August 11, 1982, that external debts of the state government stood at ₦37, 696, 232.07 as at August 9th of that year and not ₦264 million as alleged. He explained that much of the loans which was hanging on the neck of the state were loans obtained as far back as 1976 and inherited from the old northern region, former Kwara as well as Benue-Plateau State.

At that time, the state government was still negotiating for a loan of ₦230 million but not yet signed. Governor Aku had hinted of the loan sometime in May 1982, on the day he signed that year's appropriation Act into law. The loan, according to Okpe, was tied specifically to key projects which government had unbending interests in. These projects were the Makurdi International Hotel, which was to gulp ₦30 million; Integrated Agricultural programme, ₦70 million, with rural electrification taking ₦35 million. Other projects that were lined up for the purpose of the export credit guarantee loan were roads development, ₦45 million; water supply scheme, ₦25 million and Makurdi Modern market taking ₦25 million.

Sen Ameh Ebute's Allegations on Benue Allocations

Senator Ameh Ebute was first elected into the senate in 1979 on the platform of the NPN to represent Benue-South Central senatorial district. But before the 1983 elections, he had fallen out of favour with Governor Aku. As preparations for the 1983 elections got underway, Ebute had accused the NPN administration in Benue, bringing in stagnation of progress and advancement on the people of the state and, therefore, should not be given the chance to run for a second term. He alleged that the governor was involved in financial impropriety. He claimed the state government received the sum of ₦20 million as statutory monthly allocations. The NPP governorship candidate too followed suit and alleged that the state government was indebted to the tune, over ₦1 billion. All of these allegations could hardly be proved.

Meanwhile, loyalists of the state governor had completed plans to kick out Ebute from the senate. It was an open secret that Ebute's time in the senate would terminate at the end of his first tenure in 1983. But Ebute boasted that "no personality can constitute any threat to winning my senatorial seat." He was wrong. Chief Godwin Okpe, Aku's Commissioner of Finance, was penciled to replace Ebute. That accounted for the reason why Ebute too turned against the governor.

When it became obvious to Ebute that his honeymoon with his state governor and party had crashed, he jumped ship and joined the NPP in a bid to return to the senate. He lost the primaries to his political rival, Chief Ogaba Ede, the lawyer who filed the writ at a

Jos High Court on behalf of Mrs Mbateren Aku to challenge the arrest and detention of Aku in 1974. Unfortunately for Ede, the NPP leadership in the state substituted his name for Ebute to FEDECO. Ede challenged his party's decision in court but could not do much to retrieve his mandate.

The state Director of Information, Yima Sen, dismissed Unongo and Ebute's claims. Sen accused Unongo of exhibiting an "indebtedness mentality." He also released federal allocation figures accruable to the state for one year and said Ebute was spreading falsehood, which revealed "the poverty of his mind and his gross inadequacy as a legislator." The figures covered August 1982 to July 1983. Chief Unongo Tor-Ngibo also attributed these allegations as "professional blackmail" and urged party supporters to be wary of such politicians.

The federal allocations to Benue State, as released by the state Director of Information and published in *Nigeria Voice* of Tuesday, July 19 1983, showed that the Benue State government received as follows:

August 1982	₦15, 124,887.69
September 1982	₦14, 027,242.94
October 1982	₦13, 094,085.33
November 1982	₦11, 011,633.74
December 1982	₦13, 177,411.24
January 1983	₦12, 441,631.44
February 1983	₦12, 025,507.13
March 1983	₦ 9,922,758.65
April 1983	₦10, 166,350.65
May 1983	₦ 9,319,246.28
June 1983	Yet to be received
July 1983	Yet to be received

Chapter

13

The Colour of 1983 Campaigns

The run up to the 1983 general elections in Benue State, and particularly in Tivland, created a faltering process of political enlightenment, thereby destroying all the social elements of communality. It illustrated the picture that politics in Tivland, albeit in Nigeria, is contentious because it revolves around the personality more than ideas for service. As we witnessed in that era and even the successive elections that followed, this brand of political mobilization coated in caustic language was seen by supporters as legitimate and effective means for the attainment of political power.

The dramatis personae in that election, Governor Aku and Unongo, were familiar with the script played by their supporters. For Aku, in the face of daunting challenges both from within and outside the state, he may have seen this more as a relief to enable him weather the storm and stay afloat. And he, of course, applied every strategy known in the books, both in theory and practice, to remain above his traducers. When it was convenient to apply dirt, his strategists wasted no time, but it was hard to finish it with finesse. And having secured his party's nomination, the only opponent left for him was the NPP. But that was at the expense of a fractured party base.

Funny enough, the NPP's major strength revolved around the charm and charisma of their political arrowhead, Paul Unongo,

who had just left the federal cabinet as Federal Minister for Mines and Power. In his heydays, Unongo was a man who had nerves and staying power.

Sadly, Unongo's political charm could not translate into electoral victory for the NPP in 1979 and 1983. Even though the real outcome of the 1983 elections has remained an unresolved legal battle, supporters of Unongo claimed they won. For example, in the 1979 elections, out of the 57 state assembly seats, the NPP could only win 5 seats while the NPN swept 44 and the remaining 8 went to GNPP. Four of the NPP's seats were won in the Idoma areas, but even then, most of these seats were won because the NPN candidates were disqualified by the Federal Electoral Commission for one reason or the other. The NPP, however, successfully prosecuted an election petition against an NPN-elected legislator in Makurdi Central. The NPN member was found to have used his father's tax clearance certificate to tender for clearance before the polls.

The NPP's hope of getting a seat in the Tiv area was dashed because the NPN commandeered all its supporters to vote for a Hausa candidate the NPN picked to contest the elections against the NPP candidate on the platform of the GNPP. The NPN was barred from the elections and so the result was predictable. It was a clear victory for the GNPP candidate.

Interestingly, the GNPP before long merged with the NPN in the state. All their key members, including Simon Bai, it's governorship candidate, and Halilu Baba Audu, its National Publicity Officer, and Patrick Abdullahi quickly switched camps to the ruling party.

Notwithstanding all this, the NPP had high hopes that the story might change in 1983. There were these feelings that Unongo's charm and charisma would rub off on the fortunes of the party in the state. A few days before his resignation from the federal cabinet, Unongo had told a group of journalists in his house that he was "God's instrument on earth", stressing that "I am hopeful of leading a government one day."

Unongo's sudden resignation as a minister from the NPN/NPP accord government was alleged to be influenced by a plot by some NPN heavyweight to humiliate him and then kick him out of office. But he would not be bothered by that insinuation. He said, "President Shagari is the best person to answer that question. I am not in a position to know whether undue influence was exerted by my opponents."

In Benue, Unongo was putting finishing touches on how to upstage Belabo to take the NPP gubernatorial ticket. Soon afterwards, his loyalists began peddling words that the only way the NPP could make any impact against Aku was to field Unongo. The former Steel Minister, from the time he quit office, went back home and embarked on grassroot campaigns to rebuild the NPP in the state to prosecute his campaigns.

He was reported to have made certain public announcements then that 'he had pitched his tent in the wrong camp' and had realized the need to be with his people. This tended to have added credibility to the view. Whether this was machinations of political undertakers to rubbish him, it was not clear.

Because of this pronouncement, even some of Unongo's followers began to be weary. It was beginning to look as if he was almost abandoning his governorship ambition and eyeing the presidency on the platform of Progressive People's Party (PPP) which was not registered.

When Unongo finally decided to run for the governorship of the state on the platform of the NPP, three factors, Tarka, incumbency and Aku's record, weighed heavily against him. Although he showed some great political suaveness, the incumbency factor smiled at Aku. But as described by one observer "It was like a war without cause. Such wars are normally lost," and Unongo lost.

And as the campaigns got underway and personal attacks on Aku began to rise, it made the governor uneasy. One of such was the claim by the NPP candidate that whereas he was a refined politician, sophisticated and ready to rule Benue, Aku was picked up from the dust, forcing the *Nigeria Voice* to publish an editorial in its Tuesday June 7, edition captioned: "Hardly a Good Record." The paper reasoned that even if Aku was picked from the dust as Unongo claimed, "ours is a Republican democracy where the right to rule based on heritage has no place. It is a credit to the system that a man of humble beginning such as Aku can rise to the highest position in the state."

Around middle of 1982, Governor Aku began to show signs of intolerance towards the opposition. It was understandable. He became edgy as a result of much of the false public statements targeted at him just to discredit his person and administration. Going by the manner government secrets were being churned out by the opposition, the governor might have been right.

It was after this barrage of attacks that his administration introduced the oath of secrecy for all civil servants so as to keep government secrets secret. He expressed concern at the way people outside government obtained classified documents indiscriminately. This, he said, amounted to disloyalty and abuse of the service and warned that anyone caught after the oath of secrecy was administered would be dealt with severely.

He did not spare his fellow governorship aspirants either. He had also come hard on the media for publishing news reports without proper investigations or balancing. At one of the NPN campaign rallies held at Tse Amua in Konshisha local government area, Aku warned his fellow governorship aspirants against castigating his character. He said that he would no longer tolerate those casting aspersions on him just to curry favour to achieve their political ends.

Belabo, Loko joins NPN

The political class began to shuffle positions for the 1983 general elections in earnest. Paul Belabo, a former Director of the Central Bank, who lost the 1979 elections to Aku, was also even nursing the ambition to contest for the seat again in 1983. People claimed he lived like an alternate governor. He was said to have always shown signs of not giving up. He believed he could handle Aku's job. But he had a rough time.

In the first week of August 1982, the Benue State Police Command quizzed Belabo for allegedly being in 'possession' of 44 live ammunitions in his house in Makurdi. The police claimed that the discovery followed a search of houses in some parts of the state. ASP John Anefu, then Police Public Relations Officer in the state, confirmed this in a statement he issued. Even when it looked every inch political in colour and execution, Anefu claimed the search was carried out in other places like Katsina Ala, Adikpo and Makurdi.

Funny enough, it was only in Makurdi and just in Belabo's residence that the ammunition, which bore the inscription, "Ramington" believed to be the manufacturers name, was found.

And because Belabo could not give "satisfactory explanations," he was charged to a Makurdi Chief Magistrate on Wednesday, August 11, 1982 alongside his wife. The Investigating Police Officer, detective N. Kpongo who led the team to Belabo's house, told the trial magistrate that the incriminating evidence was found inside a

drawer in the accused person's residence. Magistrate E.O. Ogbole, who presided over the case, however, granted the accused bail after taking pleas.

As the case progressed, it was obvious that Aku and the NPN strategists were only preparing the ground for a big political haul on its opponents. Belabo, by this time too, began to get the direction his persecution was headed to. More and more, he felt frustrated. It became clear to him that he was also losing out in the power struggle in the NPP.

Not long after, a political situation was weaved around Belabo's judicial trial. A few weeks after, Belabo and Paul Loko, another top leader of the NPP in Benue State, decamped to the NPN. This shook the very foundations of their former party in the state. To drive home the significance of Belabo and Loko's decamping to the NPN, governor Aku personally conducted the decamping ceremony. He was assisted by the state chairman of the party, Chief Obande Obeya, and Emmanuel Atawodi, the state secretary of the party.

Both Belabo and Loko told the governor and the enthusiastic NPN supporters that they were dumping their former party because they were both "victims of insincerity and malicious deceit" of the NPP leadership in the state. They claimed they were victims of political machinations and practice, which they alleged had permeated the party right from the national level down to the state.

In their words, "we have come to the conclusion that our best choice is the NPN which has clearly emerged as the only truly national and Democratic Party in Nigeria and the melting pot for all its motley of ethnic groups. We want to assure Mr. Governor that we are coming aboard the ship at this particular point in time in order to render you the necessary support required to enable you succeed both in this present administration and in the impending elections." Aku needed every available support at this time to wade off the mounting opposition against his re-election.

With some of the NPP strong men defecting to NPN, the campaigns began to get messier and violence prone. Unongo's ambition and that of Aku began to turn Benue State into a war theatre. No day passed without news of clashes between supporters of the two political parties.

For example, towards the end of June 1983, supporters of NPP and NPN clashed at Agasha town in Guma local government area, leaving at least one person dead and scores injured. Properties were

also destroyed. This was the second major politically motivated clash in Benue State since the campaigns ahead of the 1983 elections kicked off. The first was at the residence of Paul Unongo in Gboko. No life was lost there but some people were wounded and properties destroyed. And this was a bad sign post of things to come.

The clash in Agasha town had its history in the political evolutions in the area. In 1979, Hon. Bature Agah of the NPN won the state assembly seat. But that political calculation changed drastically in favour of the NPP because of the growing influence of Chief JKN Waku, a key leader of the party who hailed from the area. That was how Hon Jerome Hwande of the NPP could win the State Assembly seat in 1983.

The NPP even alleged that its governorship candidate was targeted for elimination. Unongo was said to have fingered late Peter Dzoho, then the NPN candidate for Turan Constituency, into the state assembly as the one who exposed NPN's plot against him. But Dzoho, who later addressed a press conference on Tuesday June 14, 1983 in Makurdi, described Unongo's claims as false and insisted that the NPP gubernatorial candidate was only bent on tarnishing his image.

On another front, the NPP also accused its former director of organization in the state, Paul Loko, who decamped to the NPN with Belabo, of also planning to assassinate Unongo. Loko denied knowledge of such plans. He told newsmen at a press conference that "if there is any plan to assassinate Unongo, I have no reason to be a party to such plan. I do not stand to gain anything by such plan and I want everybody to believe that I am not involved in such a plan."

On the flipside, there were also reports that Loko was targeted for attack by NPP supporters for dumping the party. He, however, said he was not disturbed by the directive to NPP supporters to attack, destroy his car and even beat him to death, but warned that "the constitution does not allow any person or group of persons to commit unpardonable crimes."

In yet another scathing publication in the *Nigeria Standard* of June 21, 1983, the NPP through one of its leaders in the state, Chief Waku, added another dimension to the already tensed situation that was high in the state. Waku accused the state wing of the NPN of conniving with the Nigeria Police in the state to 'condone and abet political unrest against the NPP.' Thomas Ula, the NPN state

publicity secretary, denied the allegations and even asked Waku to substantiate his claims with facts.

By this time, Unongo too began to be exuberant and perhaps, rightly too. He was showing signs of impatience just as his supporters were overzealous to counter the NPN machinery. The state owned media outfits attacked him variously. The *Nigeria Voice* and *Radio Benue* were not lenient with Unongo and the NPP. No wonder, irked by the media coverage his party was getting from the state owned media outfits, he vowed while on a visit to Jos that he would dismiss all the top executives of the organizations on his first day in office.

James Ikuve, the Editor of the *Nigeria Voice* at that time would not take it lying low. He hit back at the NPP leader with so much venom in a strongly worded column a few days later. He said Unongo's anger against top media executives in the state media organs was misplaced, hence, according to him; "the coward should not be the society that runs away from the truth, the reactionary and sensitive cleavages that must hide feelings and regard truth as a taboo because they hurt."

Kpamor JT Orkar, a former Commissioner and National Vice Chairman of the NPN in the state, also dismissed Unongo's claims, insisting that it was the NPP governorship candidate who was practicing "abattoir" politics. Iyorwuese Hagher, a Professor of Dramatic Arts, who was elected senator to replace Senator Suemo Chia for the Benue East senatorial zone in the senate, also added his voice to the raging political violence. He also blamed the NPP for the violence in Tivland. Alhaji Sule Iyaji too placed the increasing wave of violence in the 1983 campaigns at the doorsteps of NPP.

At a luncheon with journalists on Wednesday July, 13, 1983 at his residence in Makurdi, Iyaji expressed concern over what he said were growing destructive tendencies in the politics of the country, particularly Benue. He said he was only committed to "politics of development and not of hate and character assassination which is so common in the body polity of present day Nigeria." Iyaji was the running mate to Aku in 1983

An editorial in the *Nigeria Voice* of July 19, 1983 entitled "Evolving a Sane Political Culture" captured the violence that enveloped the Benue political landscape. It was obvious that the state, albeit the nation, was gradually moving to the precipice. The paper wrote:

Thuggery, political intolerance, hooliganism, corruption and wanton destruction of lives and properties were all part and parcel of the politics of the 60s. The combined forces of these ills dealt a deadly blow to what was then the rising hope for democracy in Africa. This time around, things have not changed. In words and action, our politicians seem to be saying, "Old soldier never die."

That is why violence after 23 years of independence remains part of our political culture. Glaringly, we have learnt no lessons from the past. The songs and dances of violence can be heard again in all states of the federation. In Agasha, Benue State, two people died in political clashes.

In Lafia, Plateau State, ten are feared dead. In Niger, the Yan Tauris' and other party vandals pose serious threat to law and order. Along Kaduna/Abuja Road, Mrs. Janet Adetoye, a supporter of NPN died in what appeared to be a stage-managed motor accident.

With this new wave of mass killings and destruction of property, it seems that violence has become an electioneering tactic. That violence, name-calling and hatchetmanship remain major campaign gimmicks that underscore how little effort we have made to think about ourselves as a nation.

Wouldn't it be nice, for a change, if those seeking the peoples' mandate to rule tell us how they intend to bring down the price of essential commodities? How about telling Nigerians in concrete terms how we can be set free from the whims and caprices of the Western industrialized nations who hold us hostage by dictating how many barrels of oil we can produce and how much we can sell a barrel.

Wouldn't this nation be said to have come of age politically if our politicians address themselves to how we can harness the tremendous human and material resources the Almighty has kindly endowed this nation with?

Can it, therefore, be said, we dare ask, that with a population of more than 80 million and with mineral resources unequalled in Africa South of the Sahara, and

we cannot turn this blessed land into a melting pot for the black man.

What the people of this country yearn for is good political leadership to turn the tide in favour of progress. That is why we take strong exception to any attempt by any politician during this election to give the impression that all is well with Nigeria just to get vote.

To give such impression simply negates the very fact that innovation and creativity thrive most in difficult times. Japan, for example, is a major industrial power today because of the determination of the Japanese to rebuild their country after the destruction of World War II.

The United States and Europe became what they are today as a result of the concerted efforts of their peoples to survive the great depression of the 1930s. We cannot be an exception.

As the chief security officer of the state, Aku was worried about the ugly turn of events, particularly in the Tiv speaking areas. In a statewide radio and television message addressed to the Tivs, he decried the incessant political crises that enveloped the area because of the political offices. The message was in Tiv:

Ityo yam Tiv mba ken Benue state,

Hingir hange hange u mo me wa ne kwagh sha ayoosu a alu zan hemen ken tar Tiv ne.

Ayoosu ne hii ken tar Tiv ene ene sha mhii u upati ve hii campaign I ishangen I nyom I 1983 ne yo.

Ayoosu ne hii taver sha shie u ishangen I ikyonough ki Gomna ki kuma yo. Man shi ayoosu za hemen zan zan shie u ishangen ne I kar kera ne kpaa. Hegen yo nga taver a taver.

Angbianev av Tiv, mhen mer hegen nahan hanma or Tiv nan a hen kwagh sha gbenda u van a ayoosu ken Tar Tiv ga. Gadiya, shie u pati u hii hii la (ka shie u Sadauna je la), Tiv ve er ayoosu je ve nande anigbianev, tseegh ga, ve shi ve gbihi agundu a ior inya kpaa. Akaa ne cii ve lu eren

sha u nongon er ve kpaa vea zua a tseeneke ve. Man kwagh ne va a mgbe ijime kpishi ken tar Tiv.

Hegen yo, Tiv zua a tseeneke u yang eve lu keren la (ka Benue state je la). Gomenti kpaa shi va ikua kua a tar Tiv, se Tiv se mba a Hede kwata, shi se mba a Gomna kpaa sha ikyon. Man hii nan ve ayoosu alu zan hemen ken Tar Tiv hegen ne.

The text is translated thus:

My dear Tiv people of Benue state,

It has become necessary for me to address you today and advice you on the current political violence in Tivland.

This violence began as the 1983 elections drew near. And the violence increased the more just because of the governorship seat. Even after the nominations were won and lost, it has not abated. It is even increasing.

My fellow Tiv brethren, I think no Tiv man should contemplate violence in our land at this time. Because during the politics of the First Republic (that is under Sardauna administration), the Tiv people engaged in wanton destruction of properties and even killed fellow brothers. All this was aimed at gaining independence. But it brought underdevelopment to Tivland.

Now, the Tiv are independent with the creation of Benue State. Government too is now closer to our people with the state capital governor in power. But why are we still destroying and killing ourselves?"

Folk Songs in 1983 political Campaigns in Benue

Political development has shown that one of the ways of communicating political principles is through songs and music. These songs express the central message through which the ideals of the given political party are appreciated by the electorates. Interestingly, electioneering campaigns, particularly in Tivland, are weaved around folk songs. This, however, may not necessarily be in terms of programme direction but often times on individuals who are the leading contenders in the political activities in the area.

This nevertheless creates the needed tonic to woo the electorates.

Unfortunately, the folk songs employed by the two rival parties in the state, the NPN and the NPP, to drum support for the 1983 general elections were not only very provocative, but were also abusive in content and context. To some, the songs may even be thought-provoking but generally, it raised the bar in social mobilization. For instance, part of the NPN's version of the popular songs called "NPN Disco", as reproduced here with the permission of Iyorwuese Hagher, goes thus:

Tiv version:
Aku baba wam ooo,
Taver a taver Ishima helee
Or apipi ngu a gomna ga
Or apipi una ya gomna ya
Saa jaki a nyor sha ihula nulaa
Chorus:
Aku Baba lohom dinner-Nation
Gban Gban Kor lohon dinner-Nation
Or apipi u tema azongo
Tyoyam cii ka ikuleke-Nation
Orapipi uhom a mato-Nation
Mato mom kpa ne Gomna ga
Wan or apipi utema azongo
Tyoyam Tiv venda power-Nation
Orapipi uzenden tugh yum
Pawa senge a songo ibua
Or apipi u vaa a vaa
Orapipi ugbaa anzo yum
Tyo yam Tiv venda anzo agban
Aku Ikiso tema sha ikyon-no

Translation:
Aku, my father,
Be steadfast
Before the NPP wins the governorship
The donkey will pass
Through the needle's hole.
Chorus:
Aku, my father, has invited me to dinner-Nation
Gban Gban Kor has invited me to dinner-Nation

NPP man is squatting-Nation
All my people accept maize-(NPN symbol)-Nation
NPP man is fond of motorcades
Motorcades don't vote governors
NPP's man (nocturnal) travels only at night
Pawa only slaughters cows (a derision of NPP call of "Power")
NPP is always crying
NPP man (i.e. Unongo the gubernatorial candidate) you have too many debts
Tiv people don't like debtors
Right now, Aku Kiso is in power
Kwande people (where Unongo hails from) come and feast
NPP people don't feast, they only shout power
My mother Wan Mbape (Victoria, Aku's second and favourite wife)
By God's grace
We will win this election
We pray in God's name.

Note: Just as the NPP was bent on assassinating the character of the NPN's governorship candidate, the NPN's campaign songs in the 1983 elections also took on the personality of the NPP governorship candidate, Unongo. The song suggested that he was a serial debtor. And that he uses long queues of motorcade in the course of his campaigns to intimidate his opponents. But the NPN told him that long motorcades don't win elections but the people do.

The NPP too responded to NPN's vitriolic attacks with their own caustic folk songs. Here too, it is with the permission of Hagher to reproduce same.

The NPP Tiv version:
Aku Baba wam-oo
Iin-a-aii udubu helee...
Or baja ngu a gomna ga
Or baja una ya gomna ya
Gbangban a mende ahenga genegh
Chorus:

Tyo yam Tiv venda iv yum
Aku Kiso nyanden shuga
Aku Kiso utema azongo

Translation:
Aku, my father,
Keep stealing the thousands (of naira)
The NPN has no governor
Before he gets the governorship
Gbangban (Kor) will get a new nose.
Chorus:
Tiv people are against stealing
Aku Kiso is diabetic
Aku Kiso is a squatter

Note: The slant in NPP's song was derived from the many allegations of financial impropriety leveled against Governor Aku by its leadership. Also, S.J.I. Akure's allegation that the governor stole state funds and stashed away in foreign bank accounts was added to pep up their anti Aku re-election bid. The NPP thus exploited the unsuspecting Benue populace who believed the propaganda. Secondly, Aku was a diabetic patient which is why his incarceration worsened his health conditions.

Akperan Orshi's Peace Initiative

As all of this was going on, the state governor was also on the trail of some "governorship aspirants" to woo them to his side. He even hosted them to a dinner. Predictably, the NPP and UPN candidates were absent. Other candidates, who could not make it to the meeting, sent representatives. Even as Aku was preaching politics of peace to his co-contestants and calling for a campaign without bitterness, violent attacks continued with both political parties, particularly the NPN and the NPP sharing in the blame. The State command of the Nigeria Police too shared in some blame.

Properties belonging to supporters of both political parties were either burnt down or destroyed completely. For instance, a secondary school was burnt in Turan while a rice farm belonging to Iyorember Nomishan, a lawyer and NPP leader from Mbatiav district of Gboko local government was also burnt. NPP supporters too exhibited deep

level of violence. A gang of youths always formed a security ring around Unongo, and in some instances, they were said to have retaliated against the combined affront against them by the NPN supporters and the Nigeria Police.

But as the elections drew nearer, the opposition went to the extreme. For example, when the governor travelled to Britain in June 1983, the party went to town spreading news that the governor went into a coma and had to be carried onto the plane on a stretcher. The rumour was, however, rendered ineffective when the governor returned to the state. The level of destructive politicization in the state had indeed gone high.

By now, law and order began to break down in the state, particularly in the Tiv speaking area. Tor Tiv III, late Akperan Orshi was deeply worried. He then initiated a peace meeting between the three leading governorship candidates of the NPN, NPP and UPN in his palace in July of 1983. He appealed to the three leading political leaders in the state to eschew bitterness and promote peace and unity among their supporters.

Governor Aku, Unongo and Surma were all present at the meeting. They agreed to restrain their supporters from using abusive and violent tactics in their electioneering campaigns. The candidates also agreed that the singing of offensive political songs against opponents along major streets and public highways would also cease forthwith.

In the communiqué they issued after the meeting with the Tor Tiv, the three governorship candidates also agreed to end night electioneering campaigns and pledged not to protect their thugs from the law when arrested by the police. The Tor Tiv explained after the meeting that the communiqué was aimed at governing the conduct of electioneering campaigns in Benue, particularly in the Tiv speaking area of the state.

Orshi's peace initiative seemed to have helped very little because supporters of NPN and NPP continued their attack against one another with renewed aggression. It was on one of such attacks that Unongo's nephew, Johnny Ugbah, who was holidaying in Nigeria from the United States of America, was butchered to death when he was returning from Unongo's village in Turan district of Kwande local government. No one claimed responsibility but all fingers were pointed at the NPN. That singular violent act raised the stakes in the battle for the 1983 governorship poll in Benue State. This is why

the contest was fierce to the point that the outcome of the election was a subject of litigations up to the time the military took over power in 1983, barely three months after Aku was declared the winner of the polls and sworn-in.

Chapter

14

The 1983 Military Coup

The outcome of the 1983 elections had deeply polarized the nation. There were protests across the length and breadth of Nigeria with a slide towards anarchy. The political class had played into the hands of the power hungry military that were just waiting for the slip. Allegations of widespread rigging in all states, including the presidential elections, heated the polity with attendant consequences.

Rumours of an impending coup were rife in the air. The political leaders too were said to have begun to suspect the military. One of such was during the 1983 October 1st Independence ceremony in Lagos. Former President Shagari was said to have asked some of his ministers if they would attend the Independence Day celebrations with him at the Tafawa Balewa Square. It was unusual for a president to seek such favours from his cabinet members. But Shagari's enquiry was not out of place. Speculations were that the military had planned to use the frayed political nerves generated after the election to stage a coup. It was speculated that the soldiers planned to bomb the arena. That idea was later to be discarded and the execution of the plot shelved for a later date.

Audu Ogbeh, a former minister of Communications in Shagari's government, confirmed this much to the author. A top military officer visited on two occasions to intimate him on the planned coup. On both occasions, Ogbeh was not at home.

The way the ruling party shoved aside opposition parties in some states to win at all costs worsened the already fragile peace. The story in old Ondo State was one of the architects of much of what became of the 1983 elections. The NPN deliberately wanted to give the impression that it could defeat Awolowo in his domain and so decided to foist Chief Akin Omoboriowo on the state against the wishes of the people, who had preferred to return Chief Michael Ajasin of the UPN for a second term. In Imo State, late Chief Sam Mbakwe of the NPP battled the NPN to stay afloat and retain his seat.

In old Anambra State, Chief Jim Nwobodo was not that lucky. He lost his seat to late Chief Christian Onoh of the NPN. There was much turbulence across the nation that by the time those re-elected and the new entrants into the political leadership structure took oath of office on October 1, 1983, there was hardly any celebration.

The situation in Benue State was not different either. Following from the acrimony that trailed the nominations in the NPN and the attendant stiff opposition from the NPP, there were widespread insinuations that Aku did not actually win his second term but Unongo of the NPP did. Those who held onto this argument claimed that at the end of the voting when results were being announced piecemeal, Unongo was leading in the five local governments that were declared. It was speculated that since the declaration of the results were suddenly stopped, it meant that some underhand dealings were employed by the incumbent in connivance with FEDECO.

But Alhaji Sule Iyaji, who was Governor Aku's deputy in that election, dismissed such claims. He insisted that on the election Day, the results that rolled in from Tivland and Idoma land was admittedly a neck to neck thing between the NPN and the NPP. There was information filtering in that the NPP was leading and because of the immaturity and the over zealousness of some politicians in the NPP, they were said to have errorneously set to celebrate the victory. At that time, results in the Igala speaking area were still being collated largely because of the nature of the road networks in the area. According to Iyaji, "When at sunset the results from the Igala area arrived, it swallowed up all the real or imagined results that the two senatorial districts were privileged to know at that time. Some could not believe that."

Unongo refused to concede defeat to Aku. He accused the

governor of rigging and headed to the courts to challenge the results. But the election petition tribunal headed by Justice James Adesuyin, the State Chief Judge, alongside Justices Umaru Eri and Katsina-Alu as members of the electoral panel, dismissed the petition. Unongo was not satisfied and headed to the Supreme Court which ordered that the case be re-tried *de novo*. Unfortunately, the true fate of the conduct of that election remained a stillborn as the military chased away the politicians, thereby terminating the case prematurely.

By the time the military took over in December 31, 1983, the economy of the nation had worsened. Nigeria had become more of a consumer country, importing practically every manufactured item while domestic industries remained perpetually infants requiring continuous public sector support under a chronically faulty import substitution industrialization strategy.

Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, who emerged as Head of State, accused the civilians of circumventing the processes of true democratic leadership with flagrant abuse of state power which they were entrusted with. Buhari said the military staged the coup to save Nigeria from "total collapse."

He recalled that Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, who led the Federal Military Government that handed over power to the politicians in 1979, drew up and implemented a concise political programme with the aim of sustaining the democratic institutions. The new military administration believed that the politicians were not concerned with delivering on their promises.

Rather than concentrate their efforts on building on the gains of what the previous military regime that handed over power to them and to further instill discipline in the polity, Buhari observed that the political leadership of the Second Republic was only out to circumvent most of the checks and balances in the constitution and bring the nation to its state of general insecurity. The premium on political power, Buhari lamented, became so exceedingly high that political contestants regarded victory at elections as a matter of life and death struggle and were determined to capture or retain power by all means. In his words:

> The last general election was anything but free and fair. The only political parties that could complain of election rigging are those parties that lacked the resources to rig. There is ample evidence that rigging and thuggery were relative to the resources available

> to the parties. This conclusively proved to us that the parties have not developed confidence in the presidential system of government on which the nation invested so much material and human resources. While corruption and indiscipline have been associated with our state of under-development, these two evils in our body politics have attained unprecedented height in the past few years. The corrupt, inept and insensitive leadership in the last four years has been the source of immorality and impropriety in our society. Since what happens in any society is largely a reflection of the leadership of that society, we deplore corruption in all its facets.

The Buhari-led military government placed the economic crises of the nation at the doorsteps of the political class. They insisted that even though it was true that there was worldwide economic recession, the case of Nigeria and its impact "was aggravated by mismanagement."

The military authorities believed that appropriate government agencies received good advice but the leadership disregarded them. The situation, he said, could have been avoided if the legislators on their own part were alive to their constitutional responsibilities over conducting oversight. But instead, "the legislators were preoccupied with determining their salary scales, fringe benefit and unnecessary foreign travels, et al, which took no account of the state of the economy and the welfare of the people they represented," Buhari had noted.

Incidentally, not all of what Gen. Buhari and his military collaborators said was true. For, in fact, the NPN-government of Chief Okilo in Rivers State and the UPN-government of Prof. Ambrose Alli in old Bendel State initiated and constructed roads that penetrated the Niger Delta creeks and gave a boost to transportation and economic activities in that region. There were similar success stories in PRP-led Kano State under Rimi as well as in Benue State where Aku's NPN- controlled and many other states across the country witnessed significant development.

At the federal level, Shagari was engaged with the national development plan in an attempt to restore orderliness to national economic planning and development. During the preceding military era, Nigeria's economy, which had initially been organically linked to agriculture, commerce and industry, mutated into a mono-cultural economy driven by crude oil exports that created an illusion of stupendous wealth. Sadly, it has continued like that.

The discontentment among the political class before and after the 1983 general elections was enough to further drive the military into taking over.

Rumours of a pending coup plot became a common feature of discussions in public places. Aku himself was said to have heard the rumours. In fact, the governor's younger brother, Isaac Aku, was at that time the Director of Finance and administration in the Ministry of Defence. Isaac told the author in an interview a few months before he passed on that the way funds were being moved in and out of the ministry's accounts was indicative of some sinister plans by the military high command. He admitted that there was no major contract that the ministry of defence was involved in as at that time to warrant such withdrawals. He said the withdrawals came under the guise of some phoney official transactions and in very suspicious circumstances. "But of course I could not tell my brother. If I did and he had run away, I would have been a principal suspect."

But like the political leadership at that time, Aku himself was in no way positioned to take any action to stop the soldiers from staging the coup. And maybe because there was nothing much he could do as an individual.

Aku's Escape to Cameroun

Governor Aku had planned a New Year luncheon party for political party leaders in Benue State before the coup of December 31, 1983. The invitation letters were widely circulated. The move was aimed at healing the wounds of the result of the campaign and the outcome of the elections. At the close of the elections, persons, groups and certain interests had came out of the election battered while some were badly bruised. The New Year luncheon was to provide an atmosphere of rebirth and reconciliation so as to move the state forward. It never took place.

Shaahu too was invited, but as he was wont to react, he declined to attend the party. In a one-page letter he gave three reasons why he would not honour the Governors' request. He even admitted that he was being "very undiplomatic" because one, himself and the Governor had met on three previous occasions, "to look into the problems besetting the state but none of the meetings yielded any positive result." Secondly, that the Governor's had "no good intentions

for the people of the state" and thirdly that "you hate me and I too will now reciprocate by the same token. I, therefore, have no intentions of meeting you. The former minister also alleged that Aku had tried to destroy him politically and as such "I, therefore, ask you to forget about me as I have forgotten about you."

Preparations for the New Year luncheon party were in top gear when Aku returned to Makurdi on Saturday, December 30, 1983. The governor had gone to Obudu Cattle Ranch with the First Lady, Victoria, to spend the Christmas holidays. The journey from the hill top exotic hotel was very tiring. On arrival at the government house, the first family met Brig-Gen. John Atom Kpera waiting for them and a few other personalities.

As a senior citizen of the state, Kpera was a regular visitor to the Benue State seat of power anytime he was in town. And so this particular visit was of no major attention. But it was obviously in bad taste. While Aku and Kpera discussed in the sitting room down stairs, the First Lady, Victoria, carried her tired body upstairs. It didn't take long before she slumped into bed and slept off.

It is not clear when Aku and Kpera parted ways that night after their discussions before the military struck in the early hours of Sunday, December 31, 1983. But the First Lady recalled that she was fast asleep when the former governor woke her up rudely from sleep just before dawn. She said, at that moment, the only words she recollected hearing were: "Wake up and let's get out of here. There is a military coup."

Vickie said she was still overwhelmed by the fatigue of the games they played at Obudu the previous day and a tortuous journey when she wobbled out of bed. In that confused state, rather than pick up flat shoes she came back with from Obudu, she still went for the high-heeled shoes. This proved to be a costly judgement for her much later in their escape journey out of the country. It was in this state of uncertainty that Aku ferried his wife out of Government House.

They went straight to Aerapera Anemba's residence along Gboko road from the Governmnet House. Anemba was the former General Manager of Benue Brewery Limited and Aku's relation as well as a Close confidant. It was he that drove Aku and his wife to the Nigerian-Cameroun border through a hilly and rocky path where they escaped to Cameroun and evaded arrest from the military authorities. Hordes of other political associates too joined Anemba to escort the former first family to escape to Cameroun. This action

by Anemba earned him some months of detention for aiding Aku's escape.

After spending a few hours at Anemba's residence contemplating what next to do, he conferred with some of his political associates who had also converged at the residence. It was decided that the former governor should leave Makurdi immediately to avoid any awful situation. They had reasoned that if the security agencies found out where they were, he might be killed and even accused of trying to resist arrest. With these conjectures, they left Makurdi with many of the supporters in tow.

Aku's initial idea was to escape and take refuge at his wife's village, a semi-town in Shangev-Ya that borders Cameroun. Ironically, the First Lady had noticed a narrow footpath on the foot of the Cameroun mountains the previous day on the return journey from Obudu. This path leads up to the mountains and stretches into Cameroun. Among those who escorted the former first family was Gbangban Kor, the former Kwande Local Government Chairman of the NPN.

At dusk, the teeming escort team retreated to Benue, leaving the first family with two Tiv youths who were asked to accompany Aku and his wife to safety. The young men did and led them across the borders into a village in Cameroun where they met an aged man leaving alone in a small thatched house and hut. The old Camerounian man could hardly speak to the former governor even with Pidgin English. They both communicated with sign language. At nightfall, Aku and his wife slept on an improvized traditional wooden furniture in the dingy forest settlement.

The next day, Aku proceeded on his journey into Yaounde, the Camerounian capital. By then, Victoria's legs were swollen with lots of blisters as a result of the long trek and the rocky nature of the path they followed. On their way further into Cameroun, they met a man whom Aku pleaded to help carry his wife on his back. The man did but could not go far as he too got tired. As they walked through Camerounian villages, the villagers looked on in amazement as the former first family of Benue State walked through villages.

Aku and his wife spent their second night out of power at a certain police station in Cameroun. It was at the police station that he declared his status as a former political office holder in Nigeria. With his status now known, he became an asylum seeker with all the diplomatic cover. They accorded them with more respect. They

spent the next three days with the Police, but were later advised to leave because, according to the Police authorities in that area, given his political status, security agents in Nigeria may have been on his trail. And of course, the State Security agents in Nigeria were after him. They trailed him but missed the former governor narrowly after he had moved to Yaounde. On the fourth day, they were airlifted by a helicopter into Yaounde, the Camerouninan capital where they began to enjoy full benefits of political fugitives.

After about three weeks or so out of power and in solitude without any information from home, Aku's former Chief Press Secretary, Shangev-de Adzongo, accompanied by one other unidentified aide, traced his boss to their new hideout. Aku was happy to see his former staff in the strange land. At least, he was able to get a feeling of how the new military government was carrying on in running Nigeria and, particularly Benue State. Shangev-de advised his boss not to return yet, since the atmosphere was not ripe to guarantee his safety if he returned home. But deep down in Aku's heart, he yearned to return home.

Moreover, Aku was happy that his close friend, Brig-Gen. John Atom Kpera was appointed as the Military governor of Benue State to replace him. At least, he thought, he would be spared some of the harsh conditions inherent in a military takeover. And so when Shangev-de was returning to Nigeria, Aku wrote a letter to Brig-Gen. Kpera with high expectations. He explained to him where he was and sought to find out from the new military governor if he could guarantee his return to the country. Aku told Kpera in the letter that he was ready to come back to Nigeria. Shangev-de was expected to take back the reply but Kpera never replied the letter. All the same, the former first family remained in Cameroun but followed events in Nigeria keenly. It, however, did not take long before Aku made up his mind to come back to Nigeria. He came in through the Murtala Mohammed International Airport where he was arrested.

The silence from Kpera did not, however, give him the sign that he was headed for the worst with his long standing friend. Events that followed proved this. Aku began to feel the pinch from the military governor. First, it was the manner in which Aku's country home at Ikyobo was invaded by security operatives and properties carted away on the instructions of the military governor. Secondly, the conduct of Justice Umaru Eri, who headed the Committee set

up by Brig-Gen. Kpera to review the award of contracts under the previous administration, seriously ridiculed Aku's government with vexatious recommendations.

Through the visits by Shangev-de, Aku was able to reconnect with late AVM Ibrahim Alfa, the former governor's long standing friend, who further convinced him to return home. Aku and Alfa were friends right from Government College, Keffi. When Aku got these assurances from AVM Alfa and some other senior military officers he was close to, he was emboldened and so decided on his own to contact the Nigerian Mission in the Cameroun. He flew back to Nigeria with his wife, Victoria, through the Lagos international airport on January 11, 1984. At the airport, he was arrested and taken into custody to face trial.

Soldiers at Government House Makurdi

Mr. V. T. Azer, former Principal Private Secretary to Governor Aku, recounted his ordeal in the hands of some military officers that stormed the Government House. According to Azer:

> The coup took place on a Sunday, a non working day. The next working day which was a Monday, I went to the office. I was in charge of the administration of Government House and running the governor's home. I kept his upkeep allowance. By the time I got there, soldiers had surrounded the whole office. They wanted to know who I was. When I told them, they said okay. One of them, one WO II Ogwuche was in charge. They took me to the office. When we went to the office, they asked me to open the safe because they wanted to know how much we had. I did and when he saw the money, I've forgotten how much it was now. He said he wanted that money and that I should give the money to him. I said no. I am a civil servant and I have never witnessed any military coup apart from this one. I told the military officer that there is accountability. I told him if I give this money to you and within a week or so, another governor is appointed, and they ask me to bring the money that I received a week before the coup, what would I say? The officer told me that no, government is not like that. That when another government comes in, they will give another money. I insisted that as a civil servant, I got that money and I signed for it. Gidado, who was the Accountant-General at that time, knew me. And if I went back, he will ask me, what happened to the money he gave me just about three days ago. The

officer refused to see reasons with me but rather said I was not telling him the correct thing. He now told me that instead of giving the money to him, we should share the money. Still, I declined this offer. As a result of that, he ordered that I enter the vehicle they had and they took me from one point to the other.

At that time too, there was another Sergeant-at-Arms at the State House of Assembly. They were also moving with him from one point to another. In his own case, he had borrowed a generator so they wanted him to give that generator back. In the course of moving with him from one point to another, he saw me. So he went and complained to the Acting Governor at that time, Col Sani Sami, who was the Commander of 31 Infantry Brigade in Makurdi. He is the current Emir of Zuru. So he ordered that those soldiers who were harassing me should be arrested and brought to him. We were all brought to him. He inquired from me what had transpired and I told him. He ordered that I should be released but ordered that the soldiers should be tried at the 72 Battalion. So when Atom Kpera came, the matter was handed over to him. The soldiers were retired and I was exonerated.

Brig-Gen. Atom Kpera as Military Governor

The military government of Gen. Muhammadu Buhari did not waste time in appointing military governors for the respective states. In Benue, Brig-Gen. John Atom Kpera, an indigene of the state was appointed as the new military governor. Initially, there was some enthusiasm with Kpera's appointment, particularly among the Tiv ethnic group. There was a sort of communality among the two warring political groupings in the state; the NPN and the NPP. Kpera's initial acceptance was hinged on the experience it was assumed he had garnered in the old Anambra State where he was the military governor. But that enthusiasm soon gave way for despair.

On January 4, 1984, Kpera arrived Benue State to begin a twenty-month reign as the military governor. From the word go, he took some hard decisions that put to question the enthusiasm the people of the state had in him. One of this was the mass retrenchment that was carried out in the state civil service. The retrenchment exercise cut across all strata of the service. The government explained away this policy that it was to enable it streamline its overhead.

As a matter of fact, Kpera was unapologetic. His constant refrain

was that he was in Benue State on 'military posting'. Majority of the NPN leaders in the state accused him of 'going to the extreme' in his dealing with the issues that confronted him when he took over in 1984 as military governor. They argued that being an indigene, Kpera should have known that the propaganda against Aku was not true. Kpamor Orkar, who served in the sacked Aku administration as a commissioner, was of the opinion that "it appeared Kpera had a mindset. He was against us. Anybody around here that time would have known that what the NPP and its leadership were doing was false propaganda. These are people who wanted to reap where they never sowed. That is the reason why even those who ganged up against Aku to stop his re-election failed."

After the 1983 Coup

Political detainees in the state had a raw deal in the hands of the new military government. Those arrested went through gruesome experiences just because they served in the Aku administration. For instance, before the five-member Special Investigating Panel would start questioning the detained political office holders in the state, they would inform the Military governor, Brig-Gen. Kpera who would occasionally drive into the venue, the Police Mess, and sit and listen to how they keep interrogated.

Kpera wore a very disdainful countenance towards the detainees. NPN supporters felt Kpera was unkind to them. They accused him of taking sides with the NPP who didn't want the NPN-led government to succeed even when they knew they were blackmailing Aku. The NPN supporters felt Kpera would have been better off if he had not taken sides with the NPP, hence, he was seen as a close ally of Aku before the change of government.

One of the areas the interrogating officers harped on was the land clearing and development programme of the Aku regime. They questioned the rationale behind the mass land development policy and how it would benefit the state. Officials of the ousted government defended the policy of their administration passionately, insisting that there was need for Benue to embrace mechanized farming as a way out of the recurring downslide in the economic fortunes of the state. Kpera was accused of taking over one of the lands cleared by the Aku administration at Yakpande near Ikpayongo to cultivate his personal rice farm.

As a palliative for the civil service who were owed salaries for several months, the Buhari government gave the state a loan assistance of ₦54.9m to clear the backlog of salaries inherited from the ousted administration.

Another sore point in the leadership of Kpera as the military governor of Benue state was the two panels he set up to probe the administration of Aku. One was that headed by Justice Umaru Eri that was empowered to review all contracts awarded by the Benue State government in the Aku-led government. The second was that headed by S.J.I. Akure, a sworn enemy to Aku. Akure was asked to investigate activities of the Teaching Service Commission. With the benefit of hindsight, it is plausible that Kpera fell victim to those who had an axe to grind with Aku and his government, particularly the NPP.

The Eri Commission was asked to "Call for and scrutinise documents relating to contracts awarded between 1st October, 1979 and 30th December, 1983 by the Benue State Government, Ministries, Departments, Boards, Corporations and all parastatals," as well as "examine payment documents relating to the said contracts, identify and establish any improprieties in the award, evaluation or certification of such contracts."

In particular instance, the Justice Eri Commission exhibited open hatred against the Tiv ethnic group in this assignment, which included the power to "identify and establish any improprieties or irregularities in the payments made for and in respect of such contracts, to determine whether there was abuse, misuse or misapplication of monies or fund, pursuant to the contracts" and also ascertain "if abuse, misuse, improprieties and, or irregularities are established, apportion blame and recommend appropriate recovery action (s). Members of that Commission included Capt. J.C. Ogidigben, Flt. Lt. E.B. Fisher, Daniel Ugbabe and E.Y. Salifu. J.O. Ogbode served as secretary.

Eri's unguarded remarks in the course of the proceedings of the Commission sittings were said to have embarrassed Kpera and his government severely. That may be the reason why at the end, the recommendations of the commission were kept in abeyance.

Mvendaga Jibo, writing in his book: *Tiv Politics since 1959* on page 109 stated that "In the case of Akure's panel on the Teaching Service Commission, those sympathetic to Aku's regime wondered

why Kpera found it convenient to appoint Akure to probe Aku's regime. It was their thinking that Akure would use that opportunity to get back at Aku. Kpera was said to have drawn Akure's attention to this and asked him to be objective and fair."

But that was how far Governor Kpera could go. As it turned out, several teachers lost their jobs as fallout from the findings of the panel. There was a consensus that Akure's recommendations were harsh on the teachers who barely survived as a result of the non payment of their salaries.

Brig-Gen Kpera's decision to scrap Benue Hotels did not show any sign of commitment to developing the economy of the state. He was heavily criticized for this. There is also the issue of the Makurdi Sheraton Hotel. The refusal of his government to pay for and clear the equipment and fittings meant for the hotel was an economic misjudgment. Before the civilian administration was toppled, the federal government had consented that the state would not pay anything.

When there was a change in government, the military insisted that the custom duties must be paid. It is admissible that the government at that time was cash strapped, but insiders say Kpera had a choice either to get to the federal government and get a waiver renewed or pay the ₦2 million that was to be paid. Unfortunately, he would do neither. He was too much bent on following orders from the command structure of the military than evaluating critical issues before taking certain decisions. Because of this, those items were sold at the port by the clearing agent. In some cases, the equipment's were left to rot away.

In another policy misjudgement, it is difficult to explain why Kpera refused to use the equipments already procured by the Aku administration to complete Makurdi Sheraton for the benefit of the state. The magnificent Benue International Hotel estimated to have cost about ₦30 million was abandoned. Successive regimes in the state have used it to further drain the state purse. This action by the Brig- Gen. Kpera administration further depleted the fortunes of the state.

Kpera was also accused of selling all the 700 tractors Aku bought to enhance the Green Revolution Programme in the state to persons outside the state. As soon as he had done this, the prices of tractors in the market went up ten-fold.

This policy somersault by the military administration of Kpera attracted so much criticism against him when he ordered that certain items he alleged were taken from the government house be recovered from Aku's country home by soldiers. It was reported that the military team that went to the former governor's village took away household items even including kitchen utensils such as pestle, mortar and grinding stone. He has not come out to disclaim this.

Kpera was not insulated from blame in the government he inherited. For example, two weeks before the coup, Kpera was alleged to have received some money in advance on a property within the Benue Plaza Hotel to be used as official residence by the former Benue State Electoral Commissioner, Comrade A. A. Mnenga. Uji told the author that he was not aware if Kpera returned that money after their government was sacked, "at least to my knowledge."

To his credit, Brig-Gen. Kpera seemed to understand the challenges of development that Benue faced but fell short putting forward the right policy framework. This much was captured in his address on January 28, 1984 when the Head of State, Gen Muhammadu Buhari paid a state visit to Benue. He regretted that while his government had resolved to promote good government and to satisfy the aspirations of the people, the state was persistently being relegated to the position of being lumped into zones headquartered elsewhere.

He regretted that the zoning alignment of the state with others had been both inconsistent and confusing. "It does not follow any definable geographical or ecological pattern. Rather, it appears as if Benue is used to balance some form of equation. This arrangement has no doubt impeded our development. It is our plea that the present zoning arrangements be comprehensively reviewed to take care of our disadvantages and disabilities," Kpera observed.

Chapter

15

Prison Letters

Aku maintained a calm demeanour in spite of the harrowing experience inside the prison. The harsh conditions in the prisons threatened his life but he constantly wrote letters to his family and other political associates from the prison walls to keep abreast of happenings in the nation. Some of these letters were obtained from late Isaac Aku while others were from his legal representative, Chief Edward Ashiekaa. Isaac told the author before he passed on that the former governor was a man caught on the wrong side of the political history of Nigeria. "(Aku) Aper was full of passion and zeal for the development of Benue. This is what he believed in. He was determined to change the economic fortunes of the state. Unfortunately, the military thought otherwise and forced him to his early grave."

He often encouraged members of his cabinet who took out time to visit him and admonished them not to allow their spirits to be dampened by what had befallen them. At one of such times, he told a former commissioner who visited him in prison that since their consciences were clear, that alone should be their strength.

As can be seen, most of the letters are undated because they were written under much secrecy. They were written in Tiv language. The logic was to make the security men attached to the prison unable to decode the contents. He complained in one of the letters that

some of his earlier mails did not get to their destinations or maybe the contents were monitored by the security network around him. That was why he chose to write in Tiv language, to beat the eagle eyes of the security and prison officials. Even at that, he suspected that the letters may have been photocopied and taken to someone who understands the language so that they could be translated just to get the information contained therein. In fact, for a political prisoner of his stature, it was understandable that his conversations would be closely monitored.

The Aku Letters

Letter 1: I kaa a mo er u ngu van shiin tom ayange anyiin. Mzua a loho la u doo je zua ga sha ci u mfe zuan a abaver a sha ya ga.

Kaa kwase la yo shighe u ilu tovon akar heen ne una va yo alaghga vea kor un ga kpa vea ngohol passport na. Aluer ier nahan yo, alaghga kwagh la una na mgbe jime sha kwagh u makeranta na. Shi ankaam nav ma keera kpaa u hiden ami tso kpaa a hingir kwagh gen. Nahan a hen sha mi dedoo man una vaan kpaa una mase van ye.

Alaghga yange lam ar or la sha kor nahan soo u lamen dedoo ga sha ciu a fa mbatovon akaa mba keren igbinda. Nahan una faityo yo, una vaan ken ya yo, shin una vaan ga kpaa, a kar ken ape wan wam u kwase la a lu la. Nahan a kohol Tyokighir ker (my cousin), a fa or la nahan a nongo a zua a na ve lam shigh a shigh. Kpaa aluer a lamen shigh a shigh kpaa or la venda yo, a gba den tso sha ciu tindi mom ngu u una wase u zuan a kwagh hen ana ken iti yam ga. Kpaa aluer a lamen a zuan vea na yo, vea sor hanma kwagh.

Nahan shi yooso vea INSITU. Kaa un yo m kaa mer una rumun yo a yooso a mbavesen mba ve maan Hotel la, u mom la ka u a lu shin Lagos la, u sha uhar ka u a lu ker Paris la. A kaa ve yo m fa kwa mase tyo u iyange ve tindi a iwasen I pati I yange ve tindin a mi la ga. Er iyange ishangen bee, m kera zua a orbuter u iyange nengen mo sha kwagh la ga yo, m kera fa kwagh u iyange lu ker ga. Or la kpaa ka mea tindi loho, er m lu heen yo a lam a lam daang. Nahan mngu zamber ave mer vea faityo yo ve

wasem sha ciu kwase wam kua mbayev av uhar mba ken America. Mba kera fan ityo u kinbim makeranta vev ga. Shi wan wam u kwase ngu ken England. Un kpaa ngu fan ityo u kimbin makeranta ga. Nahan ka sha ci u mbam a kwagh ga, kpaa ka sha iwasen ve mlu kaan ye, me man ve kerem a dubu deri mom ken udola. Aluer a lu pe vea fa ityo yo, ve na kwagh ne hen kwase wam u ken mnger la. Or INSITU kwagh ne we ka loho u m tindi un je ne. M ngu veren ato.

Kwase wam yo aluer shi u yooso a na yo, u orum man u yem ye. Iyange m na un adiresi u he: 15 Raymond Njoku St, S.W. Ikoyi, Lagos, nahan ka sha u he ne amase ngeren shin? A er nan ve a tindi a Newsweek kua magazine mba uhar mbagen la? Note u a kaa ker er un ngu van la kpaa m zua ami. Or un nahan.

Saa me shi me ungwa hen awe. (M or kwagh u or u Kootar la kpaa wanger mo ga)

Translation of Letter 1:

I am told that you will be coming here on Thursday. I was happy when I heard this because I hardly get news from home.

Tell the woman (my wife) that now that they are investigating me, she may not be arrested but her passport might be seized. This will prove unhealthy to her academics. It may also be difficult for her to even bring back home some of her belongings. She should, therefore, think twice before she comes.

Maybe she (my wife) spoke with that man (name not known) on telephone so she could not speak out in clear terms because of the fear of the investigating officers. They are looking for ways on how to get to me. So, in case she is coming home or even if she is not, let her pass through where my daughter is and see how she is faring. My wife should meet my cousin, Tyokighir, who will take her to that man. Let them discuss face to face. If she meets the man but he still refuses, let her forget about it because there is no legal means by which they will get anything from him in my name. But if he accepts to meet with her, everything should be sorted out.

Again, meet with INSITU (Arc John Uan). Tell him to discuss with the contractors building the hotel (Makurdi International Hotel). One is in Lagos and the other in Paris. That I did not get to know what happened the last time they sent assistance to the party because after the elections, I did not meet with the whiteman who was my representative. Ironically, because I am in detention here, anytime I send to him, he does not respect me again.

Tell them that I am pleading with them to assist me. My wife and children have been unable to pay their tuition. It will be most appreciated if they can give at least one hundred thousand dollars so that my wife and children who are in America and England can take care of themselves in school. If they can, they should give the money to my wife. Give INSITU this message that I am the one that sent it and I am awaiting a reply.

If you speak to my wife again, tell me before you go back. I gave her a new address: 15 Raymond Njoku Street, S.W. Ikoyi, Lagos. Is it the new address that she wrote to or what? How did she send the *Newsweek* magazine and the two other magazines? Tell her that I have seen the note, she said she was coming. Till I hear from you again.

Letter 2: Iyange wan la vanam dubu mom, kaa a mo er u ngu za veren kwase wou ken mnger. U hide dedoo? Diabetes zam iyol ayange 14 akaa ne kpaa ngu hiden jime hegen. Or ne soon u eren fese kwagh u ortwer a kaa ga-Orvesen u Prison u heen ne. shighe gen level lu as high as 250. Weight wam hegen ka 169kg. Kpaa hegen shi chuku una lu under control.

Wan ne kaa er we u ngu a atsahur aa u soo u nan mo-aa lu yo gba nan un tso a va nam.

Translation of Letter 2:

That young man gave me one thousand naira (₦1000.00) and told me you were taking your wife abroad. Hope you returned safely? In the last 14 days, my diabetic condition worsened but I am a bit better now. The senior prison officer here is always reluctant to do what my doctor tells him to do. The other time, my sugar level went up as high

as 250. I presently weigh 169kg but it will soon be under control. This boy told me you have some tablets of soap to give me. Just send it to me.

Letter 3: Ior mban va toom m za nenge a kwase sha ijiir ve. Or u heen ne, (Tor purusu) cia kwagh gande. Ka kwagh cian tseegh kpaa a feityo u tindin a kwagh wam la ga ye. Kpaa mo yo a mba akaa a ngan nahan cii ken mase jime yo ka kwagh u Aondo a soo la una er ye.

Or ne va nam ikpa mom. Shi kwase kpaa a vande teren mo kwagh sha mi. Doom kpishi er u nenge a wan wam u vesen la a hidi a yem sha Kaduna nahan. Wan la taver itough gande un! Shi doom kpishi er kwase wou u sha uhar a zough wan wam ugen la a makeranta hen Makurdi nahan. Sha kwagh ne yo, ishima I memem.

Translation of Letter 3:

The prison officers took me to go and see my wife at their place. The head of this prison is always afraid of doing even little favours. It is because of fear that he has not been able to send what I gave him. But I thank God because He knows why.

This man gave me two hundred naira. My wife too had hinted me something about it. I am happy that you have sent my first son back to Kaduna. That boy is proving to be too stubborn. I am also happy that your second wife secured one of my children's admission in Makurdi. Because of this, my heart is at peace now.

Letter 4: M zua a kwagh ngeren wou la. Iyange se ungwa I yoo ati kua I Gomna utse u Imo kpaa se ungwa kwagh sha iti yam ga nahan lu lanen se ishima.

M nger kwagh la kasua u a kar la je kpaa m ngu fan Tor u Purusu ne ityo ga. Ka or uke man a kav kwagh kpaa ga. M tese un Section u Decree la a nenge kpaa a kav kwagh shon ga. Nahan wen er un una forward kwagh la yo a va de un tom. Iyange I tom ataan 17.10.84 la je yo va sha pe se lu detained ne yo mo vea na se zoho dzwa sha kwagh shon.

Nahan m wa copy m na sha ikev I or ne. Aluer u fa gbenda u u er ve advanced copy la una ar ana fele yo a doom. M pase or u m tindi ne kpaa. Aluer ngu prepared u wan a little more kpaa a doo. Ka kwagh u se nongo more than possible ga. Kpaa se nongo sha er se faityo tseegh. Hanma kwagh u a shi se was ha ikev I Aondo.

Translation of Letter 4:

I received your letter. We heard the announcement of names including that of the former governor of Imo State (Sam Mbakwe) but didn't hear mine. I was surprised why it's so.

I've written to you since last week but the Head of Prisons here is very difficult. He is so afraid and does not know anything. I even showed him the section of the Decree but he did not understand. He keeps on telling me that if he forwards that which I've written, he will be sacked. In fact, when he visited us where we are detained on Friday, 17/10/1984, I quarrelled with him seriously over the matter.

I have enclosed a copy of what I wrote here. I will be happy if you can send an advanced copy to that man and also explain to the man I've sent. It will be most appreciated if he is prepared to add a little more. Let us not over burden ourselves over this matter. We'll do our best and leave the rest to God."

Letter 5: M wuese kpishi sha er u ze ityom yam la fese man u er tom shami fese nahan. Sha kwagh u kwase u ken mnger la yo, ka sha er iyange m kaa mer un kpaa a rumun u van la ve m kaa mer a va ye. Ken forms mba pasen akaa a u lu a mi (diako wou) la, ve ver ajiir aa kwase, man mbayev kposo, nahan iyange ve soo er mo m pase akaa a kasev av kua shi a mbayev av. Nahan m kaa mer mo m fa akaa a kasev av ga. Kpaa shi m pase ve mer ka un a lu a BDC sha ikev ye. Nahan alagha aluer a va yo, ka sha kwagh u BDC vea kor un er a pase ve kwagh shami ye. U hemban taver je yo ka iyou I BDC ve lu maan shin Makurdi la. Ka wen kua Architect u u kohol un her ga la ve hemba fan kwagh sha mi ye.

Doom kpishi a dzende wou man er mbatovon mbera kpaa ve lu nengen sha ashe ve mba aie mba ior ve lu wan mo iyol nahan. Ter u sha ngu her. Sha kwagh u Mr. Garland yo, mfa ga shin a taver Ashiekaa u negen a mou? Sha ci u ijir yo i or I bee, nahan alaghga ior mbera vea soo u nan ican.

Nahan aluer wea faityo yo, zua a Pittman, sughun nam man shi kaa un yo m kaa mer una faityo yo either a za tswen, gayo a za vea Ashiekaa ve za nenge a Mr. Garland hen hotel na la, beem Eko ka a lu her ye. Ve pase un yo aluer unafaityo yo, a hide a inyaregh kira a za kimbi Benue State Government vough er iyange I na un nahan. Una been yo, a too terms mba yange I sign agreement la nahan a tese hen ape Government u Benue yange er sha mi ga ve tom timbir u hiin la a tese ve shami shami. Una been yo, una faityo u pinen ve claim sha inyaregh ki yange un vihi kpaa lu sha ibo na ga man I hingir u a kera za hemen a tom ga la.

Aluer ngu a inyaregh kira her ga yo, a bunde kpaa a dza pase Government u Benue kua shi mbatovon kwagh ne er, iyange un lu veren ishima er una zua a inyaregh shin Government u Anambra hen ape iyange un lu vanden eren tom a ve la. Kpaa er inyaregh kira kera va va fese ga yo, un too kin un vihi shin Anambra, un lu henen her shighe kpuaa tso kira kia va. Man shi shighe la kwagh u compensation u ior mba iyange I ngohol ve inya shin Makurdi la lu a bee ga, nahan un lu henen er shighe la Anambra kpaa vea kimbi un, ve iyange un too inyaregh kira un vihi ye. Man a pase ve tsembelee aluer una fa Aondo yo, er ishan kobo imom tso kpaa un man ken inyaregh kira shin ma iwua I genegh kpaa ga.

Kpaa aluer mbatovon mban ve vande korun wen yo, kaa Ashiekaa kua shi Pittman ve nongo tsung ve fa pe I ver un la man I contact un a loho ne. Aluer se zua a na a or kwagh ne wang hen mbatovon yo, a ker luun chan u zan hemen a ifer I ior ne ga. Iyange mbatovon mban tesem kwagh ngeren u Mr Ugoh, Commissioner u T &I (Trade and Industries) man Toryima Orga je kpiligh mo iyol sha kwagh shon ne.

Aluer ishima ta kwase u ken mnger la akperan yo, a gba den tso. Sugh un nam. Sugh kwase he man mbagenev cii nam.

Wanakiriki u a tee loho ne pinem kwagh man ka sea veren kwagh ken records yo se kera faityo u dughun ga saa kwagh u u soo wer I yam I nau la. Tso a pinem 150. Man ngu a iwasen kpishi. Nahan aluer u nenge a orgen la man u zua a kwagh u iyange shi la yo 250-(inja na yo m kaa mer a yazo), dugh 150 na wan ngun. Mo yo de kera we iko ga sha ci u m ngu a kwagh heen hegen. Aluer u faityo u nan un ga yo, orum sha er me nongo me zua a mi heen yo.

Translation of Letter 5:

I am happy with the way you have acted fast on my messages. About the woman (his wife) overseas, I told her to come that is why she is coming. In the forms for the next of kin that the investigators gave me, there is provision for wives and children. They wanted me to fill those spaces but I declined. I told them I don't know anything about my wives' businesses. I, however, told them that it's my wife that runs B.D.C. So I suspect that they will be questioning her on what she knows about B.D.C when she comes. Most importantly, they may want to know more about the construction of the house in Makurdi being built by B.D.C. It's between her and the architect you did not meet at home that knows much about the building.

I am happy that the investigation team is seeing the tissue of lies people peddled against me. I leave everything to God.

I don't know if it will be difficult for Ashiekaa to see me in respect of Mr. Garland since the case has been concluded. So if you can, please get Pittman, tell him I send my warm greetings. Tell him also that either he goes alone or with Ashiekaa to meet Mr. Garland at his hotel. I think its Eko Hotel that he normally stays. They should tell Mr. Garland to refund the exact money that was paid to him back to the Benue State government. He can then ask for refund on claims based on the percentage of what

he did since it was not his fault that the work could not go on.

If he doesn't have the money, he should go and explain to the Government of Benue State and the Investigation Panel how he used the money to execute the contract given to him by the Anambra State government. He should tell them he will refund the money when the payment from Anambra State government will be made. And also that because the issue of compensation to those whose farmlands were taken was still going on, he was sure the money from Anambra will come early. He should explain himself properly if he knows and fears God.

But if the investigation team has arrested him before you get him, tell Ashiekaa and Pittman to try and know where he is detained and should be told this message. I was shocked when the investigating team showed me what Mr Ugoh, Commissioner for Trade and Industries, and Toryima Orga wrote about all these. I wonder why it should be so.

Tell the woman overseas that if she is not comfortable with coming home, she should just leave it.

This young man is very useful to me and has asked for an assistance of ₦150 but I am constrained because once we keep our monies with the prison officials and it's recorded, they won't release it to you except on what you want to buy. So if you see the other man and he gives you the balance of ₦ 250, take ₦ 150 and give to him. Don't bother about me. I have enough here now. If you are unable to give him, let me know so that I can get it here and give him.

Greet your new wife and others.

Letter 6: M soo di tso mer fa Or ne. Una paseu iti na. Wen ngu mom ken u Chief Duruba heen. Nahan mba chekin un er mbayev mbera nahan ga. Hegen yo mngu a ma ityom ga, kpaa ka di sha ci u shighe ugen tso. Wanye ugen la a hii u va nam mo ikav ichimbiv mbira kua shi foto u mbayev. Wea lu a sam ukundu nahan kpaa na un.

Translation of Letter 6:
I just want to introduce this man to you. He will tell you his name. He is one of the senior prison officials here. They don't check him like they do to the young officers. The young man has started bringing drugs to me and the photograph of my children. If you have some money with you, please give him.

Letter 7: M zua a loho wou la. Shighe u Ashiekaa una va tso me nger me paseu kwagh sha kwagh u u kar wer ior mba orun la.
M ngu nongon sha ci u aluer I zenda wan ne mimi yo a zua a tom a hera eren. Aluer mbayev mbera (Ahura & Akua) vea lu a yem ga yo, or or nana za a ve sha S.I.P (Special Investigation Panel) ve za er application er ve soo u nengen a mo. Aluer ve rumun yo, vea za amo sha mi me nenge a ve. Sugh kwase nam.

Translation of Letter 7:
I received your message. I will write and give you details on what you say people are saying about me when Ashiekaa comes here. I am trying to see if they sack this young man truly, he should get something doing. If my children, (Ahura and Aku) have not travelled back, ask someone to take them to the Special Investigation Panel to write an application that they want to see me. If it is approved, they will take me to them and I will see them. Warm regards to your wife.
This particular letter was dated. October 31, 1984.

Letter 8: U nder nena? M wuese kpishi sha loho wou la. Ka ior Aondo a using ve sha u vihin, shin u wasen ior mbagenev ye. Hen ape m ongo imo I orvesen u mba purugh agirgi a utya la tsegh kpaa kundum iyol. Hanma kwagh u a shi cii se wa sha ikev I Aondo.
Bedsheet wase ne doo ga man shi ka a ile fefa. Nahan m soo bedsheet ugen kua pillow case. Ve a lu uhev je kpaa man I doom. Iyange I 17: 10: '84 la m za State House Clinic sha u za nengen a dentist. Alaghga shi me lu zan

nyian 31:10:'84. Alaghga a gba u tswuwan inyigh mom. Aluer gba nahan yo, vea tsua vea wa ki gen.

Translation of Letter 8:

Governor Aku wrote this letter on 31/10/1984.

Good day. I appreciate your message. From experience, I've discovered that God uses people in many ways. They either destroy you or help you. I am comforted by hearing from the Senior Airforce Officer (family sources say this officer was late Chief of Air Staff, AVM Ibrahim Alfa. He was a long standing friend to Aku. In fact, it was in Alfa's house that Aku died while visiting Lagos. It is said that AVM Alfa convinced Aku to return from exile). Every other thing, I leave it to God.

The bedsheets we have here are not good enough and they get dirty easily. So please get me another bed sheet and pillow cases. I will appreciate it the more if they are new ones. On 17/10/'84, I went to State House Clinic to see a dentist. Maybe they may remove one of my teeth today (31:10:84). If that is so, they will put a new one.

Letter 9: M zua a loho la. Akaa a u tindi la yo, or la orum sha zwa. Una mase nyorun a mi tegh tegh. Sha kwaghorun u tor u mba purugh lakpaa m ungwa man doom kpishi. Sha kwagh u angev ou mbu asher la, er nan u ter tor u mbapurugh ne kwagh sha mi ga? M ungwa mer ve sember yamen agirgi a utya vea Russia. Nahan a faityo u wan we sha delegation u zan ker man u za nenge a ortwer u ken Moscow la ga? M fa ga.

M nger hen Member. Kwagh utaav u man la doom ken ato man ken ishima ga cii. Or nahan u dzaan mnger yo maa u za tindi un a mi. Shi or un taver taver. Alagh ga zough a inyaregh a vihin sha taav ye. Me soo u timen man mimi aluer mba a bee u kimbin makeranta na ga yo.

Poor Mr. White! (May his soul Rest In Peace.) Kera je kpaa iyange lu a angev mbu ishima. Aluer u faityo yo, or Or atindigh u sha ya la a nenge sha kwagh u ijir I High Court yan nam N2.1m la ve mbera ve laha I yem a mi sha Appeal

Court la. Hanma kwagh u a lu zan hemen sha mi cii a orum.

M soo u orun kwagh u Ayua kua Mzehemen vea Vor. M fa er I er ve Mzehemen a gbe ikaren ga. Iyange eren dedoo. Onov mba JK I kaa er ve er vihi kpishi I zenda ve sha Bristow man Govt Sec. School, Gboko. Imba ngila nahan yo, m fa kwagh u me or sha mi ga. Akohol er nena?

M chimbiv mbira kera je kpaa se pande mbi nahan kera kam er iyange I luun la ga. Kpaa taver u fan er a pande ve a lu shami vough la. Pe u lu zan la ka ken America shin ka Ingilandi? Ka hanma tar kwase wou a lu henen makeranta?

Or kwagh u m nger hen Member ne. Aluer u hen wer a doo kuma ga yo orum.

Translation of Letter 9:

I have received your message. But for the items you sent, the man you sent told me verbally but will bring them in one by one. I am also happy about what the airforce officer has said. However, I am worried about your eye problem. And why have you not told the airforce officer? I heard that the airforce have just acquired new jets from Russia. Maybe if you tell him, you might be included on the delegation that will be going to Russia. Then you can use the opportunity to treat yourself in Moscow.

I have written to Member. I don't like the news I am hearing that she now smokes. Send the letter to her when you get someone travelling overseas. And warn her strongly. Maybe she gets free money that is why she spends it on cigarettes. Help me to find out if they have not finished paying their school fees.

Poor Mr. White. May his soul rest in peace. I am aware Mr. White had heart related problems.

The High Court gave a judgement in my favour and I was awarded the sum of ₦2.1million but the other party went on Appeal. Please tell the lawyer back home to look at the Court judgement and let me know everything that is going on in regard to this case.

I want to say something about Akua, Mzehemen and Vor.

I don't know why Mzehemen failed his exams. He used to do very well. I am told that Jk's children have performed so bad that they were expelled from Bristow and Government Secondary School, Gboko. What do we do about this?

I have reduced those drugs because I no longer feel as I used to. However, it is difficult to know what level it will go that will be most appropriate. Which country are you going to? Is it America or England? Please, read what I have written to Member and let me know if it is in order.

Letter 10: M zua a kwagh la deri utaan. M wuese kpishi waan kaam er kwase ngu dedoo nga-Sugh un kpishi nam. Mo kpaa kwagh er ga.

Translation of Letter 10:

I received five hundred naira. I appreciate so much. This young man told me that your wife is sick. Please, extend my warm regards to her. I am okay for now.

Letter 11: Wea lumun yo tindi a loho ne. Wangbian u kwase wam la, Mrs Caro Malu una mase wan kwagh la sha ikev I kwase wou u shin Makurdi la una gema a tindim a mi. Kaa lawyer yo me soo u a aer gbenda a nenge a mo fefa je.

Translation of Letter 11:

Please, send this message. My wife's sister, Mrs. Caro Malu, will then hand it over to your wife who is in Makurdi. Tell the lawyer that I want him to come and see me immediately.

Letter 12: I yange vande van a tion chii man Caro va ye. Shi va mase van a dubu shighe u iyange u lu za veren kwase ken mnger la. Kohol cii yo ka dubu man tion. Kpaa aluer ka kwa u mase jime ne tseegh iyange u na dubu man tion yo u pasem nahan se fa kwagh u se er a na yo. Ka kwase u a eren tom shin Makurdi la a mar yee? Yo congratulations.

Kwagh uior mban taver. Ka ve doo shi ve vihi. Kwa u maseityo ne a vam a atsahur ahar, aftershave uhar, ityogh ki atsem imiom man ikondo I huan sha vanger la.

Sugh mba sha ya mba ve ve cii nam.

Translation of Letter 12:

I was given half before Caro came. Then he later gave me one thousand when you were travelling abroad with your wife. In all, its one thousand five hundred. But if it was the last time you gave him one thousand five hundred, let me know so that I will know what to do to him.

Is it the woman in Makurdi that has delivered? Then congratulations. It is difficult to understand these people. The last time, he gave me two tablets of soap, two after shave, a shaving stick and a shirt. Greet everyone who has come from home.

Letter 13: Ayange atar a a kar ne sugar wam unde yem sha 200, kpaa m hide a mi jime kwagh kera er ga. Ngu normal hegen. Wan la iyange va nam deri utaan m soo u pasen we ye. U tindi loho u sha ya la vee? U or di wan ne mrumun sha dzwa tso.

Translation of Letter 13:

In the last three days, my sugar level went up to 200. But I have managed to bring it to normalcy now. That young man gave me five hundred naira that's why I want to let you know. Have you sent that message home? Just tell this young man verbally.

Letter 14: Or iyolakuhe ne ka me tindi un kwagh u I lu felefefele je nahan I hemba ayange ataan kpaa a lu aza ga. Hanma shighe me pine yo a er aie er un za kpaa un kohol we her ga. Man un hemba ngun a ian I nyorun a kwagh hen vegher wase ne. Mba pativ mba shiin ve mba ve soo kwagh wase ga ne kpaa ka un aze ve ityom ye. Yange wan la yam inyaregh la un kpaa ungwa kwagh sha mi. Ka nahan yange tsor er una zaan mo ityom ye. Ve or fe kwagh ve ga. Shin er ka mnger ken zwa wase nahan kpaa a doo ve ga vea za bugh a too foto u loho la tso vea

ker or nana za pase ve kwagh u a lu ker yo. Nahan m soo u been a na tegh tegh aluer mea faityo yo.

Or u mtindi un ne ka Ordam mba sha Ogoja. Wanye shoja u dzwa wase u a lu vea mo heen ne ka wan ne gbem a tindin un ye. Ngu er alaghaga una lu a inja I lun guda nahan, m fa ga kpaa msoo u Karen wen. Wan ugen u oratindigh yange va ve mtindi un la ngu humeen nahan. Kpaa iyange ilu felefefele man iyange m tindi un ye. Iv yo ngura iin ga.

M soo mer oratindigh ne a fa ijiir I wanye uhe u m tindi ne shaer aluer a va ka felefefele kpaa una va nenge ana yo. I kaa er oratindigh wam ne ngu nyorun alaghaga ker tom ayange anyiin ga yo ataan.

Sugh hanmaor nam.

Translation of Letter 14:

Anytime I send this Yoruba man with an urgent message, it takes him more than five days before he delivers it. And when I ask him, he will lie to me that he went to your residence but he did not meet you. He is the only one that has access to this part of the prison. Even these politicians from the south west that don't like us, he is the one that runs their errands.

He was aware when that young man stole my money. That is why he accepted to be running my errands now. But one is not too sure of these people. Because even as I write these letters in our language, I suspect that they may open it and make photocopies and give it to someone to interprete for them. So I want to take my time and see how best I tackle him gradually.

The man I've sent is from Ogoja. The young Tiv army officer who is here with me also runs errands for this man. He looks like he will be of good character. I don't know but I want to test him. The other young man whom I sent when the lawyer came seems to me like a fool. The good thing about him is that he doesn't steal.

I want the lawyer to know where this new person I am sending lives so that when he comes and it's urgent, he can still go and see him. I am told that my lawyer may be coming either on Thursday or Friday. Greet everybody.

Aku wrote the following letter when he was on admission in the hospital due to complications with his health.

Letter 15: M zua a akaa la cii. Or u tindi la yange za wegh ker mase van a 140 tsegh shi m fa ga m na un 20. Kpaa or ne yo a va a mi cii. M wuese kpishi. Abaver a yange u nam la doom je zua ga, gadia er mba nengen yan mase nengen mo la je m kera fa akaa a a lu zan hemen sha ya ga.

Kwagh u alu cii, se wa sha ikev I Aondo nahan zam iyol ga. Mlu wam shin iyouci kpaa ka ma kwagh ga. Hemba doon di heen a sha purusu. Orshoja ne fa kwagh a mo. Kpaa alaghaga me hungwa gambe yo, gbenda ua kera lu u zuan ana ga. Nahan m soo mer a za sha we vea Or duruba u a yaren tom sha purusu wase la, nahan ngula yo me faityo u tindin un hanma shighe cii.

Ne faityo u zan hemen a kwagh u mbanyiman atindi la. Ashiekaa man Nder vea kuma. Hanma shighe u ve lu orun ijir sha mi tso a or ve. Beem er ka kwagh u musan inyaregh u Hileikyar (Justin Hon) yan va er chov chov ne a lu van mo a kwaghbo ye. Kwagh genegh yo mbatovon mbera mba a hon ashe shami m fa ga. Aluer mbera soo u dughun Aerapera (JA Anemba) tom sha apera yo vea gba dughun tso; gadia shighe u ishangen la lu a hingir orvesen hen tom la ga.

Sugh hanma or cii nam. Mba sha ya, angbianev man ahur aiyol cii. I de ze or iyol ga. Hanma kwagh u a er cii ka tom u Aondo. A hemba fan.

Translation of Letter 15:

I have received all the items you earlier sent to me. The person you sent pilfered it but gave me ₦140 naira. I did not know and still gave him ₦20. This man, however, gave me everything. I am grateful.

I am happy with the news you brought to me because since the last time the doctors checked me, I have been kept in the dark about happenings at home. I am not bothered because I have left everything to God. My stay in the hospital is nothing too serious. It is better here than in the prison. This soldier man attached to me is very kind.

So maybe when I am discharged from the hospital, it may not be easy to get him. That is why I want him to meet you with the prison officer in charge of our section because I can send that one all the time.

Please go ahead with the defence. Ashiekaa and Nder will be up to the task. Keep them informed anytime the case is coming up. I think my main problem is how Justin Hileikyar Hon mishandled the exchange of the foreign currency that has complicated my case. Apart from that, the investigative team have not told me anything

If they want to relieve Aerapera (J Anemba) of his job, they should just go ahead. He was not even the head of that organization (BBL) at the time the elections took place. Greet everyone at home. Brothers and friends. Let nobody be troubled. All that is happening is God's wish. He knows best.

Letter 16: I wish to thank you for the action so quickly. M zua a dubu mom la. Kwase wou nyor kera dedoo ga? Yo lu dedoo.

Translation of Letter 16:
I wish to thank you for the action so quickly. I have gotten the one thousand naira. I hope your wife arrived in America safely? Thank you.

The letter numbered 17 was apparently written after Aku was sentenced to a 15 year jail term under the Anti-Exchange Decree of 1984. The Decree punished a whole lot of offences including offenders who may or may not have been found guilty before the commencement of the Decree but not earlier than 1st October, 1979, or those who made payments without the permission of appropriate authorities to or for the credit of a person outside Nigeria.

Under that Decree, it was also unlawful for anybody who made any payment without permission from appropriate authorities to or for the credit of a person resident in Nigeria by order or on behalf of any person who is resident outside Nigeria or any person who does make such payment whatsoever in respect of any loan, bank overdraft, or other credit facilities outside of Nigeria. The intent of this law negated the principle that one is innocent until proven

guilty. The burden to prove otherwise was heavily placed on the defender that he had permission of the appropriate authorities for any currency transaction.

Letter 17: Tso u ngu nena? M zua a takeda wou la shi I orum sha zwa mve wou heen kpaa nyian. Yange m tindi kwase u ken mnger la takeda, m wa takeda ugen hen or u u ter iti na la ker mer a tindi un a mi. Shi m wa ugen hen orgen la kpaa u a lu lawyer la. Ve cii m kaa a ve mer, aluer vea faityo yo, kwagh u a shi cii ve gema ve wa sha ikev I kwase la. Or u u ter iti na la lu waan wegh vea Terna Agor. Terna kpaa er kwagh wanger mo ga er yange m or u nahan. Nahan m kar mer a gema wan wegh wen tswen unafaityo yo. Nahan tenger kwase u ken mnger la korugh, kaa un yo mngu pinen mer azua a takeda u iyange m nger ve m wa takeda u hen or la ker la jee? Man una zua a min yo, a faityo u tindin loho la hen or la jee? Una tindi yo, or la er nena?

Sha ci u aluer a er kwagh sha mi yo, una faityo u eren er iyange se or nahan ga. Nahan saa se ungwa hen kwase u ken mnger la man me fa kwagh u se er sha mi ye. Or u atindigh u keera la yo yange waan wegh ve or u iyange na shieda sha ityough yagh ve iwuhum ne. Tso er me or kwagh a or wase ne kpaa gbenda ngu ga. Kpaa un kpaa iyange m kaa a na mer aluer kwagh shi yo, a gema awa sha ikev I kwase u ken mnger la.

Aluer ve er kwagh sha mi kpaa wa shima de eren akaa la ga, na answer sha ikev ii or u m tindi ne tso me kaau kwagh u u or un yo.

Tso I de ior tom sha ya kpishi nahan mba orun er nena? Mo aluer or a zer keman mo gbem, mea va nguren keman a nan yo, or a de vaan ga. Me shi me ngeren tso me orugh awashima wam.

Ijir I Akpenlamen (Godwin Daboh) yange yila ior mba sha ya la I er nena sha mini? Wen yo ka han a lu hegen? Man ngu eren nyi? Wan mbayev av mba ahumbev mba iyange m na ve Jip (Jeep) la shi u nenge a ve jee? Alaghga a va gba u me soo u eren kwagh a ve. Iorpuu Juladaco yo ngu han hegen man ngu nena? Mvendaga (Jibo) yo

commission u Eri (Justice Umaru) I ter un ker nahan mba eren a na nena? I kaa er mba eren panel uhe ugenegh sha ciu u minister, nahan vea soo ior er un nahan shin? Mba mpin av mban ngee yum nahan saa me ungwa hen awe.

Translation of Letter 17:

How are you? I have received your message and have been told that you will be coming here today. I sent a letter to the woman overseas (his wife) and enclosed another letter for the person you mentioned. I also sent another letter to the lawyer. I told all of them that if they can, they should give everything to that woman overseas. The person you mentioned used to sign with Terna Agor.

I am not impressed the way Terna too has behaved like I told you. So I told the woman to be signing alone if it will be possible. So put a call across to the woman and find out from her if she has gotten my letter. And if she has gotten it, was she able to relay the message as I asked her to do? And if she did, what is the man's response.

So until we hear from her, then we'll know what to do. The other lawyer used to sign with the man whose testimony has landed me in jail. I don't even know how to communicate with that woman. I had told her that if anything is remaining, she should hand over to the woman who is overseas.

Even if they have done as I have directed, do not do anything yet, give me an answer through this person I am sending to you then I will tell you what to do.

I heard that there has been massive retrenchment in the civil service. How are the people reacting to it? People should stop looking for my trouble because if I react, nobody should complain.

What has become of the court case instituted by Akpenlamen (Godwin Daboh) against his kinsmen? And where is he now? And what is he doing? Have you seen those lousy young men? I gave them my jeep. Maybe I may still need to do something with them someday. Where is Iorpuu Unongo now? I am told that another panel is going to be set up for ministers. Maybe they may need

him also. Have you heard anything about Mvendaga Jibo? What is he doing in response to Justice Umaru Eri Commission that has mentioned him severally?

Let me stop here. I believe my questions are too many so till I hear from you.

Chapter

16

Imprisonment and Travails Unto Death

After the military toppled the civilian government in 1983, the federal government empanelled military dominated investigation panels to try political office holders who served in the ousted administration. Only one High Court judge was a civilian.

Politicians in the Second Republic were variously accused by the military of embezzling public funds. The verdicts from these tribunals were extremely controversial and scandalous. Jail terms ranged from 21 to as much as 252 years.

The investigation and trial was grouped in states. Benue State fell under Jos zone where Aku was drilled by the Special Investigation Panel (SIP) before he was recommended for trial. It was headed by Brig-Gen. Peter Adomokhai. Other states in this zone included Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Gongola and Plateau. Other members of the panel were Navy Captain Jubril Ayinla, Lt-Colonel Isaac Adebunmu, Wing Commander Sunday Cole and Mr. Justice Joseph Ogundera.

As it turned out, it was clear the military had the mindset to rig the outcome of the tribunals. The only possible exit point and right of appeal that was available for those convicted by the tribunals were to the Supreme Military Council which was again an exclusive assemblage of military officers (and the Inspector-General of Police). The military were the prosecutor, judge and jury in all these cases.

The Nigerian Bar Association did not find the composition of these tribunals tidy. They made presentations to the federal military government but were ignored. In protest, the NBA barred its members from participating in the tribunals. But the military would not back down. The trials went ahead and jail sentences passed on several other prominent politicians and officials including Melford Okilo, the former Rivers State Governor and Aku's comrade in the minority struggle. Okilo got 21 years for illegally holding bank accounts abroad, contrary to laws applying to Nigerian public officers as prescribed in the new military Decrees promulgated into law.

Other prominent politicians convicted by the tribunals were former governor of old Anambra State Jim Nwobodo, his Bendel State counterpart, Prof. Ambrose Alli, Kwara State governor, Adamu Atta and Auwwal Ibrahim, the former governor of Niger State now Emir of Suleja. Former Finance Minister in Shagari's regime, Victor Masi, was also jailed for corruptly receiving nearly $5.45 million from a construction company. The two former governors of old Kano State, Mohammadu Abubakar Rimi and his successor, Sabo Bakin Zuwo, were jailed for 21 years for illegally accepting bribes to facilitate a property deal. Boxes full of cash were alleged to have been found in Zuwo's home after a raid by security operatives.

Justin Hon, Governor Aku's Principal Private Secretary, was the window through which the Special Military Tribunals recommended Aku's trial and subsequent imprisonment. His testimonies implicated his boss the more. But somehow, Aku exonerated Hon in a letter he wrote to his lawyer, Edward Ashiekaa. He said Hon was blackmailed by the prosecuting police officer to implicate him. (See letter below).

Hon had told the investigating panel that Aku once sent him to transfer £10,000 from one overseas account to another. Aku denied the allegations, and was said to have even attempted to slap Hon in the witness box but was stopped by security agents present in the court room. He insisted that his aide lied on oath and that he had those accounts before he became governor and did not put any money in them during his tenure.

Uji told the author that the said amount of £10, 000 was given to Aku by Chief Okilo, former governor of old Rivers State, to help him in his electoral legal battle against Unongo who was challenging Aku's re-election in 1983 at the courts. Hon was accused of mismanaging the situation by purchasing the foreign currency in

the black market instead of going through with the official procedures. At that time, the military government had issued stern directives that any bank transaction more than ₦5,000 must be reported to the authorities.

Another error of judgment on the part of Hon against his former boss was his hurried involvement in something that was clearly a party affair. For instance, there was to be an NPN State Congress in Benue State. The Authority to Incur Expenditure (AIE) had not arrived from Lagos, headquarters of the party. Unongo Tor-Ngibo, the former state treasurer of the party, had approached the governor for funds. The governor said there were no funds but if there was anywhere they could borrow, he should do so.

James Anemba, who was the General Manager of Benue Breweries Limited at that time, was present and offered to loan the party the sum of ₦200, 000. But instead of Tor-Ngibo, the party treasurer collecting the money, Hon erroneously signed and collected the money. In all, Uji said "the trial was wrong and not normal because in the case of the money from the brewery, it was entirely a private company with the Benue State government having only a share capital of just 17.5%."

After the military panel had concluded its investigations, Aku was sent to the Justice James Oladipo Williams led Exchange Control (Anti-Sabotage) Tribunal, Lagos zone on a two count charge of illegal procurement and unlawful importation of foreign exchange. He was sentenced to 21 years in jail. Aku's other 'offence' was that he engaged in "corrupt practices by withdrawing ₦199, 475.00 from the account of Benue Brewery Ltd." He was ordered by the tribunal to refund ₦206, 479.00.

Aku was dragged before the Tribunal for the trial of offences under the Exchange Control (Anti-Sabotage) Decree 1984, under Charge No. LECT/2/84 dated May 18, 1984 and two counts were proferred against him. The charge sheet was signed by a Principal State Counsel, one Ime Essien Udom (Miss).

> **Count 1:** That you, Aper Aku, in the month of December 1983 in Lagos, Nigeria, without the permission of the appropriate authority and not being an authorized dealer, procured one Justin Hon to sell the sum of fifty thousand pounds sterling (£50,000.00) to a person other than an authorized dealer and you thereby committed an offence

contrary to Section 1(1) (a) of the Exchange Control (Anti-Sabotage) Decree 1984.

Count 2: That you, Aper Aku, in or about the month of June 1983, in Nigeria, unlawfully imported into Nigeria foreign currency to wit: ten thousand pounds sterling (£10,000.00) and you thereby committed an offence contrary to Section 1 (1) (k) and punishable under Section 2 (1)(a) of the Exchange Control (Anti-Sabotage) Decree 1984.

Even though Chief Melford Okilo testified at the tribunal that it was he that gave Aku the (£10,000.00) he was charged on Count 2, the tribunal ignored Okilo's testimony and even with the flaws, went ahead and delivered a sourious judgement that was obviously predetermined before the tribunals began sitting.

Anemba, a relation of Aku and former general manager of Benue Brewery, was also sentenced to 25 years in prison. He was accused of "engaging in corrupt practices by withdrawing ₦199, 475 from the account of Benue Brewery Ltd and enriching Aper Aku in various sums totaling ₦209, 475. 00.

When Gen. Ibrahim Babangida ousted Gen. Buhari in a bloodless palace coup on August 27, 1985, the federal military government set up the Justice Bello Review Tribunal to review cases of those imprisoned. Aku's sentence was reduced to 5 years but also re-confirmed the refund of the sum of ₦206, 479.00. He was ordered to be released immediately but banned from holding public office and from participating in party politics. Later, government in issuing the white paper further reduced Aku's imprisonment to 3 calendar years. Anemba's jail term was first reduced to 5 years by the Armed Forces Ruling Council, AFRC and later to 2 years.

Aku's Appeal for Leniency

The first two letters used hereunder, written by Aku, describe how sad the erstwhile governor felt when he found himself in this troubled condition after a meritorious service. The first one was addressed to Barrister Ashiekaa. It reveals the inhuman treatment political prisoners were made to face at the hands of the military after they seized power in 1983. The second one was written after the Armed Forces Ruling Council, AFRC, ordered the release from detention

and imprisonment of political office holders convicted by the ousted administration of Gen. Mohammadu Buhari (rtd).

Letter to EK Ashiekaa

After Aku was sentenced, he wrote an emotion-laden letter to his legal team, asking that they approach the Head of State on his behalf on compassionate grounds. He listed his unalloyed commitment to the Nigerian project and his love for the people of Benue, whom he said he had served creditably. The letter reads in part:

> Section 10 of the Decree No7 under which I have been convicted makes provision for the Head of State of the Federal Military Government to allow or disallow any conviction or sentence.
>
> I do not personally intend to write any representation to the Head of State because I am not familiar with him and the general anger of corruption found in the body polity of the whole of the ousted regime. So unless there is some form of general previous knowledge of an individual by him, I consider it would not work very well. On the other hand, if you feel free to discuss some salient points with him on my behalf before he takes a decision, I shall appreciate very much. This request is not meant to put you in a difficult position.
>
> Please feel free to do it only if you are convinced that it is a worthwhile exercise.
>
> In case you decide to see him, maybe I should arm you with some points that if brought to his knowledge, would influence his decision:-
>
> 1. The positive side of my service to my people should also be considered
> 2. I still believe that my conviction on the two counts was only by omission and not deliberate. On count (1), since I sent Mr. Hon to change the money, the fault of omission is mine that I sent him at all. His purchase in black market was not on my instructions. He did not even say this in his statement to the police without involving others I know as a fact that when

Mr. Hon was waiting to give evidence, the prosecutor came and threatened him that if he did not testify before the tribunal that I specifically asked him to sell in black market, they would turn round and prosecute him. Mr. Hon's statement to the police also contradicts with that of the driver who said that he did not know where they were going and it was Mr. Hon who directed him to Bristol Hotel where this business was conducted. But Mr. Hon. in his statement to the police, said it was the driver who showed him where to go and do the business. There were many other assumptions and flaws in the judgment but as there can be no appeal, we just have to accept the judgment. On Count (2), the omission of illegally importing £10,000 came by the fact that I was not expected to be at immigration and custom point myself. I filled the declaration forms, but as usual, all I was told was that all cleared and we moved with lots of work at home, certainly one would not immediately take into account such omissions.

However, the conviction and sentence has come and gone, you are probably aware that I have been sentenced 15 years on Count 1 whereas the minimum for it is 5 years, and 10 years on count II for the same minimum.

I wish the Head of State could consider both the convictions and sentence because I have tried my best to identify myself with my country believing that I did not commit any offence. It was with this belief and commitment that I decided to return on the 11th of January from the Cameroon knowing fully well that I would be at least detained for some time. If I believed that I committed any offence, and if I accumulated ill-gotten monies abroad etc, I would have decided not to contact the Nigerian Mission in the Cameroon voluntarily as I did to come back.

I wish to add that I have no regret at all for coming back despite the hardship I am facing because I am

proud to identify myself with my country. I consider the convictions as unfair and the sentences as too severe. Another problem that is worrying me even more in the conviction and the sentences is my health.

a. I have been diabetic since 1983.

b. A peculiar type of hypertension that I developed since June or so 1983. I was rushed to the states in September that year and went again in November 1983. There is only one prison doctor of general practice for all the prisons in Lagos and sometimes he cannot be seen for 3-4 weeks and the situation is getting worse

c. An X-ray of my heart also revealed that the walls of the inner chambers were inflated. This was discovered at the same time in September 1983 and it is very difficult, under detention and prison conditions, to monitor these two last mentioned problems and even sometime to get the drugs that were prescribed.

These three ailments I have mentioned can lead to either a sudden stroke or heart attack.

3. You may have noticed in the papers the photographs they take show that I am wearing a celvic collar. That is a nervous problem by itself that is equally serious but has very long drawn sad effects leading to stroke that may paralyze on one side. The authorities here and the doctors here, including the one at the Creek Hospital, have not been willing to cooperate with the doctor(s) that accompanied me when I went to the States or UK for these examinations and have contact with the specialist as well as records.

In short, even if all the other factors are disregarded, I am suffering in silence healthwise here. But they are the type of diseases that unless told, you would presume that one is sound and well.

So I hope if you feel disposed, please let the Head of State know about these facts as he takes his decision on my conviction and sentence.

My best regards to friends and family.

PS: If you have close confidants amongst your colleagues please discuss with them the wisdom of seeing the Head of State on the matter before you do.

Aper Aku
Kaduna Prison

Aku was kept at the Kaduna Prisons after his conviction. A year after Gen. Ibrahim Babangida overthrew Gen. Buhari, Aku wrote a letter dated 27 August, 1986, to the Chairman of the Federal Special Investigation Panel, one A. Jika, a Commissioner of Police. The former governor raised some fundamental issues in relation to his conviction and conditions for his release as directed by the AFRC. It was titled:

Re- White Paper on Justice Bello's Review Panel

I wish to thank you for your letter ref. SIP.7/8/VOL.I/230 of 14th August, 1986. I would like to raise the following observations.

1. Although my prison sentence on currency trafficking was quashed, the fact remains that as from July 1984, I was sentenced, and this sentence ran into the second sentence long before the review panels were set up. I would therefore feel that it could be only fair if we start counting my term of imprisonment from when my first sentence was pronounced.

   In short, that should be as from July 1984. In which case now that my sentence has been reduced to three (3) years, I should qualify for release provided I had no money to refund;

2. Although the tribunal ordered that I should refund two hundred and six thousand, four hundred and seventy-nine naira (₦206,479.00) and this view was upheld by the Bello Review Panel, according to the

Government decision expressed by the Armed Forces Ruling Council, as shown in the white paper, I am not expected to refund the said amount. I stand to be corrected.

3. In case you can show that I am still expected to pay that money, then I would like to refer you the Government White Paper on Justice Aguda's Review Panel. In that paper, Government is to refund two hundred and four thousand naira (₦ 204, 000.00) to me and also two thousand and fifty pound sterling (£10,050.00) to me. In that case, you please adjust the two hundred and four thousand naira (₦204, 000.00) in your favour and I shall pay the balance of two thousand four hundred and seventy-nine naira (₦2, 479.00) to you in naira while you in turn will arrange for the two thousand and fifty pound sterling (2,050.00) to be paid to me.

I will very much appreciate your co-operation on all the posts replied.

Yours faithfully,

Aper Aku

It is not clear if Aku's eventual release from prison was as a result of the pleas and issues raised in the mails to Ashiekaa.

Mohammed Abubakr Rimi, Second Republic governor of old Kano State and a co-inmate of Aku at the Kaduna Prison, confirmed how deeply hurt the former governor was when his former Principal Private Secretary, Justin Hon. gave false testimony against him at the trial. Rimi said Aku got so angry with the testimony in court and almost slapped him but was held back by security officers in court. "When we got back to the prison, he could not hide his shock over the lies his personal staff told against him." Rimi, who spoke with the author barely two weeks before he died as a result of an attack on him by a gang of armed robbers, said Aku told him he had so much trust in the appointee. In Rimi's words, "Aku was just a victim of the brutality of the military that seized power from us. I saw him as a true nationalist."

By the time Aku's government was sacked from office, the state's finances were severely overdrawn. This was largely due to the shortfall in revenues accruing from federation accounts as a result

of the oil glut that took its toll on Nigeria. Many of the projects he had begun were later abandoned by the administration of Brig-Gen. Atom Kpera who succeeded him and subsequent governors of the state. The elaborate agricultural production programme he had embarked upon was abandoned. Most, if not all other infrastructural projects he initiated, were also abandoned.

It is interesting to look back now and see how things were, how they are now and where we are heading and how the moral pendulum is swinging so negatively. Aku was one of the most humble of human beings. He was a man of very little pretensions. He was straight forward. In his disposition, he was a very down-to-earth politician who sincerely saw politics as an avenue for lifting, not himself but his people. Until very recently, most of the things that Benue State could boast of were the projects he initiated and left behind.

Audu Ogbeh would capture the lifestyle of Aku in the following words: "In the Second Republic, the budgets were so tiny. If you compel them to the figures of today, of course, it is clear to distinguish and know the import of financial prudence between then and now. But of course, then the naira was stronger. Aku was a very sensitive person who, because he had such a view of life, was extremely troubled when people accused him of the things he didn't do. And so when they threw him into the furnace of politics accusing him of all kinds of things, he was brutally hurt. Moreso coming from persons he had so much trusted."

When the coup of 1983 took place and all the politicians were thrown out of office and Aku was accused of keeping $10,000 and sentenced to prison, it was ironic. When he finally got out of prison and died in AVM Ibrahim Alfa's house, very few people knew what the man went through. During one of his visits to Lagos, after he was released from prison, it was Chief Godwin Okpe, his former Commissioner for Finance, that bought his flight ticket back to Makurdi. Aku had absolutely no money.

During his governorship, Aku travelled to the US on an official trip. To the amazement of some of his aides, he stayed in a very modest hotel in New York and even ran out of cash. The year he died, he planted a lot of high yielding rice. He asked Ogbeh, his political soulmate who had a rice mill, if he could also get him one industrial milling machine. Ogbeh agreed. Aku was in the process of taking delivery of the milling machines Ogbeh ordered for himself

and the former governor from South Korea when Aku died.

Ogbeh told the author that the milling machine he ordered for himself and Aku cost the sum of ₦18, 000.00. The amount was sourced from Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Obasanjo would later bounce back in 1999 to be Nigeria's president after spending some years in jail over allegations of coup plot leveled against him by late Gen. Sani Abacha. Ogbeh disclosed that Aku "told me he didn't have all the cash. I told him when you install; we'll see how you'll pay. He was going to start a small rice mill of half a ton an hour. Then he died."

Ogbeh summed up on Aku's leadership thus: "When we look back now, certain lessons will come out of this. Here are these men in history who were so modest and so down-to-earth compared to what we have now. They died unsung and in penury. And this is a country that is also consistently asking for selfless leadership. There are very many of them like that. The question is: who praises the man who serves his country selflessly? What is the pension scheme for a governor? What was he expected to live on after governorship? And why do you think today that the younger governors are not foolish than those who left with very little to their name? Today, they take care of themselves beyond imaginations. What happened to men like Aku is also a very sad reminder that there's something missing between the ideals and reality. And it's for this society to decide on it before it can begin to expect selfless leadership. Otherwise whoever goes in there and walks out naked, has volunteered for future penury."

The only houses Aku left was an uncompleted duplex in Makurdi, along Gboko road. There's yet another in Gboko. That was his main residence when he ran for governorship in 1978. In history, he is among those idealists who have gone to their graves across the globe who have suffered terribly.

When Aku died on November 14th, 1987, the Benue State government refused to give him a state burial. The government said they would not want to set precedence. Whatever that meant. But Aku's followers and friends rallied round and gave him a modest burial. The military governor of Benue State, Maj-Gen. Ishaya Bakut, was afraid of attending. All the same, he got just a humble burial like any other prominent citizen in the state. The state had no role to play.

His Travails in Death

The 1983 coup left Aku deeply impoverished. And because he did not live a flamboyant lifestyle as some of his colleagues in other states did, things began to take their toll on him. Right from the time he was detained and later sent to prison, life became unbearable. His wife and children who were in schools in the UK could hardly fend for themselves. They could not even afford some basic needs. (See letters from prison.)

Aku's health was broken by the harsh conditions in jail, and he died in 1987 shortly after he was released from prison. Dr. Tor Agbidye, Aku's former personal physician told the author that because of Aku's existing medical condition at that time, those gruelling years he spent in prison with little medical attention made him a candidate for sudden death. He noted that the prison condition put Aku in the classes of sudden death which mostly has links with central obese, caused by cardiovascular accidents. (See letter to Ashiekaa.)

The week he died, Aku had gone to Mkar Christian Hospital, near Gboko to meet with Dr. Agbidye to get a prescription for a particular drug. He was travelling to Lagos to attend to some other engagements and also the Lagos International Trade Fair where he hoped to reconnect with some business partners. Unfortunately, he did not meet Agbidye. He left a message. Agbidye felt since he too was going to Lagos that week for his post graduate exams at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, he would meet with him and then give him the prescription he needed. But fate pushed them further apart. Agbidye's car broke down on his way to Lagos. And when Agbidye finally got to Lagos, he was so sick that he could only manage to go for his examinations.

Family sources say Aku had planned to use the trade fair to reconnect with some of his friends and start up his business. But death came knocking just as the trade fair ended. Aku went out for his basketball game but that was to be his last public outing. While on the field playing basketball, the game he loved unto death, he was heard shouting, "my heart, my heart and then collapsed," Dr. Agbidye said. Unfortunately, no autopsy was carried out on him to determine the real cause of his death.

By the time he died, he left some very embarrassing debts, to the tune of ₦531, 514.72 both in his personal capacity and in the name of his company, Benue Development Company. This amount was

inclusive of interests that accrued from the loans over time. His younger brother, Isaac Aku, who had retired from the federal service, in a letter to Ason Bur, then deputy governor of Benue State in the Ibrahim Babangida administrative contraption dated November 19, 1990, lamented how the crediting banks were already threatening to seize some of Aku's houses in Makurdi and Gboko. Bur, however, could not do much to save the family from further embarrassments.

On July 9, 1991, Mallam Y. Sule Jakaye, the branch manager of Union Bank in Makurdi in a letter to Isaac Aku titled: "Request for Interest Waiver: Account of Mr. Aper Apollos Aku (Deceased)" noted that the bank could only waive interest on the said loan only "if you repay in full, the sum of ₦80, 278.00 in full satisfaction of the debt now standing at ₦226, 919.00 latest by 31st August, 1991. Failure to meet the condition, this exceptional concession will lapse and the whole debt becomes repayable and we shall be compelled to explore harder means of realizing our money."

The Benue Development Company, which the late governor operated, had also secured a facility with First Bank that he was unable to pay by the time he passed on. As at April 1987, the company's indebtedness to the bank stood at ₦65, 199.00. And by 1995, the bank initiated a court action and obtained judgment for ₦660, 000.00 with interest at 21%. To stave off part of the debt, Akua Aku, his first son, paid back the sum of ₦70, 000.00 to the bank and requested for a waiver on the interest.

Through negotiations with the Aku family, the bank agreed that the sum of ₦238, 000.00 be repaid. Since the family was unable, even to meet up with this sum, a Makurdi High Court in a suit MHC/47/95 between First Bank and Benue Development Company Ltd and 2 others attached a Peugeot 505 Saloon car with registration number AE 495 GBK belonging to the wife of the late governor for sale. The auction sale was only stopped through an injunction the family obtained in court.

Worried by the turn of events, Isaac Aku wrote the former military Administrator of Benue State, Col. Dominic Oneya, on January 20, 1998, seeking for his help to liquidate the amount so that the car could be released to the widow. Oneya was said to have acted swiftly and the money repaid to the bank. This intervention from the military administrator saved the late governor's family from further harassments by the bank.

Aku lived and served Benue with every sense of commitment and died unsung. But given that the Benue State government has no known legislative instruments like monthly pension allowances for its past elected political leaders, particularly those who served as elected governors, the family grapples with daunting economic difficulties till date.

Chapter

17

Epilogue

Goodluck Jonathan: A Product of Minority Struggle

From the First Republic, leaders who fought for the political rights of the minorities felt that the colonialists unduly gave Nigeria out to the three major tribes–Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as if it were their sole property. Since then, there has been this feeling that even after Nigeria gained independence, when leaders who emerged from these three major tribes exhibited so much disdain against the minority tribes in terms of appointments into public offices.

President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua died, the mantle of leadership of Nigeria fell on Goodluck Jonathan. Though circumstantial, it brought some relief to the minority groups that alas, some hope is here. Some called it fate, but in all, it was a pointer that the political fortunes of the minority groups in Nigeria had begun to change. The days leading to his ascension to the Presidency were very trying times for the nation. These were moments that challenged the national security and stability of the country. In all, the National Assembly, governors, civil society groups, the mass media, and other patriotic Nigerians played very decisive roles in ensuring that the constitution was followed to the letter.

That underscores why from the moment he was sworn in as President on May 5, 2010, after the death of Yar'Adua, he came under intense pressure to make a declaration concerning his political future, particularly if he had intentions to contest in 2011. He declined to do so immediately because it would have sent the wrong signals. It was on the premise that Jonathan returned a few months later to seek for a fresh mandate to the office of president.

The fact is that President Jonathan is the very first person from the minority groups in the country to seek for and be elected as president of Nigeria. This contributed to the huge mobilization of people, not just from the South-South geo-political zone, but across the country and across all religious divides. The support of key political leaders across the country to Jonathan's ambition added to his successful showing at the 2011 polls. Apart from that, there was a general unwritten language among the minorities in the country to demonstrate support for Jonathan. More than anything else, Jonathan's presidency has rekindled the political consciousness of every citizen that, given the right persuasion, every aspiration will be achieved. No doubt, the struggles and even persecutions of our heroes past was not in vain. But to appreciate whether this phase is plausible to the overall interests will be seen after he leaves office.

The character of the PDP also helped Jonathan's ascension to the presidency. Historically, the party is known for displaying unflinching support for the leader of the party, both at the state and federal levels, who has an interest to continue in office. It was that the leadership of the party at all levels would do everything possible to ensure a successful outing for their leader. No officer wanted to be seen as disloyal. But most importantly is the rise in the political awareness among the minorities in the country.

The support for President Jonathan was predictable. The reason for this was hinged on a number of factors. The first is the resistance by the minority ethnic nationalities against certain political values that run contrary to the interest of the minority groups and states.

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Interview with:

Vincent Uji

Dr. Kpamor JT Orkar

Alhaji Sule Iyaji

Toryima Orga

Chief Audu Ogbeh

Chief Godwin Okpe

Hon. Ugba Ugeh

Mr Isaac Aku

Mrs Victoria Aku

Appendix

INAUGURATION BROADCAST BY MR. APER AKU, GOVERNOR, BENUE STATE, 1ST OCTOBER, 1979

Fellow citizens of Benue State,

As you are aware, I have been sworn in today as the first elected governor of our state. By this act, we have entered into a new phase in the task of building our state.

You will recall that the state was created in February 1976 as a culmination of the desire of our people to have their own state and assume full responsibility for the management of their public affairs in the context of a united Nigeria.

Naturally, the creation of our state raised the aspiration of our people for rapid development. Regrettably, many of these are yet to be met.

I take over, fully aware of what needs to be done to meet your major economic, political and social expectations.

My administration, whose cabinet members I will shortly announce, is carefully formed in order to assist me in tackling the problems of development which have to be faced. Some of these problems were there at the time the state was created, while some new ones have been piling up ever since.

In the face of all these, I pledge to run an administration which is honest, just, fair and open. Needless to say that it will be a purposeful one, as well.

To succeed in my assignment calls for your continued support

which, I believe, will be forthcoming.

Civil Service

There are certain groups in the state whose strategic position in public affairs makes their cooperation in the years ahead particularly important. However well-intentioned a government is, it cannot achieve its goals if it depends on a corrupt or indolent civil service to carry out its social, economic and political programmes.

In our situation, if the truth must be told, we must admit that while Benue has many well educated and highly experienced public servants some of whose attitude to work is commendable, it is nevertheless a fact that, on the whole, the state civil service has its share of the lazy, corrupt and indifferent members.

It is this fact which explains, in large measure, the performance of our service which has fallen below the expectations of the average citizens of the state. Against this background, I wish it to be known that my administration will NOT tolerate any public servant, however highly placed, who is not prepared to give loyal and dedicated service to the government and people of the state.

I, therefore, wish to appeal to anyone whose salary is paid out of public funds to resolve NOW to undergo a change of attitude to work. I expect that dishonesty will yield way to an honest approach to work; punctuality to work must replace lateness. Above all, property abuse must cease. At all times, the public must be treated with courtesy and understanding by public servants.

It is my wish to have a civil service which is politically sensitive and is therefore respected by the people it has been set up to serve. Consistent with that desire, I wish to assure the civil service that everything will be done to ensure that it is equipped to play the role expected of it. We will be quick to reward honest and dedicated service just as we shall deal speedily with any established cases of dishonesty, insubordination or absenteeism in the service. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Manifesto Cabinet

The people of Benue State overwhelmingly voted me into office to implement the manifesto of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). They prefer my party's manifesto to any other in the country.

It is my intention to implement the NPN manifesto efficiently and at a reasonable speed. The intention is to achieve results which, even some of our opponents who are honest will commend.

This consideration has been the dominant concern in my appointment of commissioners. The people whom I have chosen to assist me in running government affairs have been most carefully selected. As you will see, I have picked people who are knowledgeable, energetic and, above all, they are people who have an honest track record in their previous fields of calling.

Subject to confirmation by the State House of Assembly, your commissioners and the ministries they are to take charge of have been named. You will notice at the end of this announcement that the ministries have been re-organized.

The appointments are as follows:-

1. Agriculture & Natural Resource- Mr. Sule Iyaji
2. Education-Mr. Mvendaga Jibo
3. Finance-Mr. Athanasius Angereke
4. Justice (Commissioner for Justice and Ag. Attorney-General) Mr. Andrew Adejo Ogri.
5. Housing & Environment-Mr. Vincent Tyoikaa Uji
6. Trade & Industry- Mr. Abu John Ali
7. Works & Transport- Mr. Joseph Targema Orkar
8. Rural Development & Cooperatives-Mr. Moses Abi
9. Local Government Youth & Sports- Dr. Orban Nyiakura
10. Health & Social Welfare-Mr. John Musa Shaibu
11. Economic Planning- Mr. Godwin Okpe

Furthermore, special advisers to the Government have also been named as follows:

1. Special Adviser on State Security Matters-Mr. Nelson Eka Onojo
2. Special Adviser on Political Affairs and Chieftaincy-Mr. Peter Vande-Acka
3. Special Adviser on State Economic Affairs-Mr. Toryima Orga

Two directors will be named later.

I should explain that, in the process of making up my mind as to

whom to appoint commissioners, I came under considerable pressure from lobbyists and even from certain well-meaning members of my party.

I wish to assure anyone whose advice or pressure was set aside that my overriding consideration at the moment of decision was, and will always remain to do the best thing for the majority of our citizens who are yearning for good government. Of course, there are some other suitable people within the NPN and outside it who may meet the stringent considerations and may therefore be appointable. These people have not been appointed for the simple reason that the number of vacancies are highly limited.

I believe that such people will continue to make themselves available for other key appointments which we shall make in due course. There is an important message which I want us always to remember. In the end, the most important consideration is NOT in WHAT capacity you served but HOW WELL you served our people in WHATEVER capacity. I have much confidence in the ability of the people chosen to meet your legitimate expectations.

Appeal to Businessmen

At this juncture, I wish to speak specifically to the top businessmen and women who transact business with the Government of Benue State. I want you to realize that you will only be patronized if you are honest in your dealings with the people of this state. Any of you who, in the past, had thrived on shoddy and shady business must take it that he or she has today reached the end of the road, unless they are prepared to turn a new leaf.

From now on, my administration will insist that the people of Benue State get value for money in all government transactions.

In the light of the foregoing fact, I hereby warn contractors NOT to attempt to bribe any member of my administration. Anyone who violates this warning will face the full consequences in store for him.

Economy

Let me emphasize some of the salient economic plans which I intend to implement. As soon as I have the correct financial picture of the state government, urgent step will be affected to ensure that

dormant projects like road construction, rural electrification and housing (among other projects) materialize at an acceptable speed.

Industrialization of this state will be rigorously pursued. We will ensure that a favourable investment climate is created here to attract big scale investors.

I hope to give you our detailed industrial plans when we settle down, but I want to reassure you that I am painfully aware of the fact that our state is economically depressed. Per capita income in the state is one of the lowest in the country; housing is inadequate; employment opportunities outside the state civil service are too few. We expect massive economic assistance from the federal government to back up our efforts at industrial development.

Agriculture

My party's manifests to emphasize the agricultural sector as the one in which massive investments will be made usher in a "green revolution".

We intend to encourage our farmers to raise their productivity and thereby improve their incomes. We will establish a COOPERATIVE BANK early in the life of my administration. This bank will be run in such a way that it will make loans available to farmers with reduced fuss. Finally, I wish to say a few words on the UPE scheme which is in an appealing state. I regret the conditions which exist in many of these schools.

It is the intention of my administration to involve the community in tackling the poor state of repair in which many of these schools now exist. The ministry of education will announce the details of approved plans in this regard in due course.

I wish to end this address by thanking everyone and every institution who has made a contribution to the welfare of the people of Benue State in the past. I wish to thank particularly our traditional rulers who are making an immense contribution to the peace and stability of the state. We hope that we can continue to benefit from their wisdom.

We similarly believe that the religious leaders and their organizations in our midst have made a significant contribution to whatever has been achieved in the past particularly in sustaining the moral fibre of the state.

I hope I can continue to count on your support and guidance.

Very finally, we realize that some of our policies and action which will be taken in the interest of the majority of our people may injure the interests and feeling of a few of you. We appeal to everyone to react to these policies and actions with understanding, if not sympathetically. I wish to assure all of you that every action and policies of my administration will be done in good faith.

Since ours will be an open administration, it will be easy for every interested party to always try to get at the facts leading to the decision which we shall be making from time to time.

In this regard, we will cooperate fully with the press and other honest critics of our efforts whose contribution to the progress of the state could be positive.

Fellow citizens, let us, together, build a state that will be fair and just. A society which is based on the fear of God.

Thank you.

1st October, 1979.

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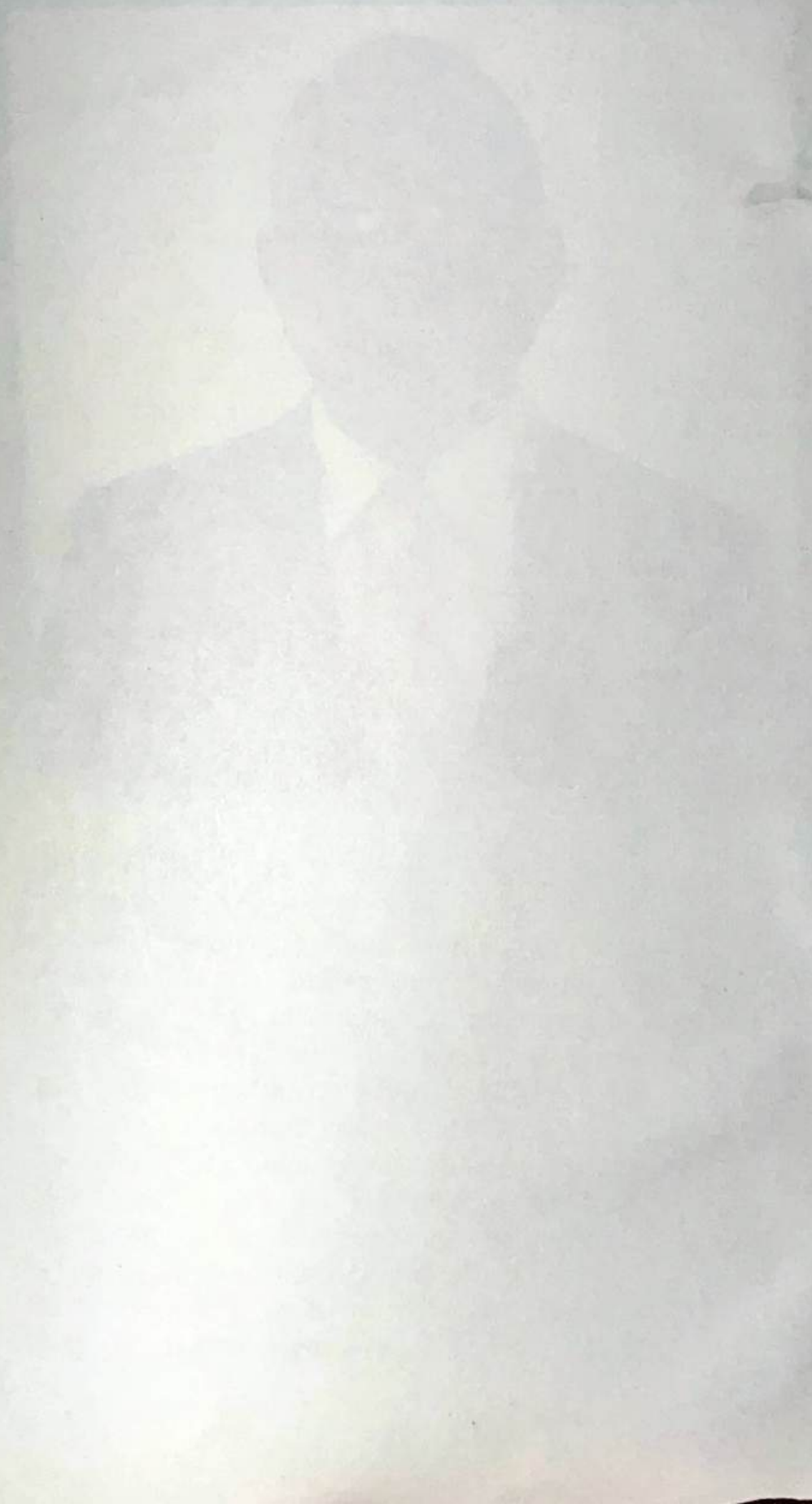

Nathaniel Ikyur is a journalist and has worked with distinction at Vanguard Newspapers, a national daily in Nigeria. He holds a combined Bachelor of Arts Degree in Mass Communications/ English from Bayero University, Kano and is awaiting result for an MA in International Relations and Strategic Studies, from Benue State University, Makurdi. *Aper Aku: The Rise of Minority Politics in Nigeria* is his first book. He has also edited "State Violence in Tivland: A Compendium on the 2001 Tiv/ Jukun Ethnic Violence". From 2003 till date, Ikyur has worked as a Legislative Aide at the National Assembly, Abuja. He is currently a Senior Special Assistant to the Speaker House of Representatives, Rt. Hon Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, CFR. He is married to Regina and they have three children: Tersur, Nguavese and Sedondo.

Aku's greatest and perhaps most understated political achievement was his role in the minority struggle for political relevance. Perhaps due to the larger than life personality and the pivotal role played by his more illustrious mentor J.S. Tarka in the emancipation of minority groups in Nigeria from political marginalization and discrimination…"

–**Gabriel Torwua Suswam,** *PhD,*
Executive Governor of Benue State.

"Aku had a very broad view of Nigerian politics at the time and the future. And he demonstrated this much when he alongside other patriots across other minority groupings saw the danger of the minorities falling out of place in the scheme of things in the country if certain parameters of political equation were not properly put in place …"

–**Rt. Hon Dr Joseph Wayas,** GCON,
Former President of the Senate (1979-1983)

Apollos Aper Aku was born of a humble beginning in 1938. He shot himself to national prominence in 1974 when he accused the former governor of old Benue-Plateau State, Police Commissioner Joseph Deshi Gomwalk of corruption, nepotism and bad governance. It was the beginning of his rise to leadership. In 1979, he emerged as the First Executive Governor of Benue State at a period when the state was witnessing widespread abandonment by the military government. In four years and three months, Aku through exemplary leadership was in a hurry to develop Benue State. His dreams were high. And he moved very fast. He was also a champion for the minority rights, a crusade he led so well but which also pitched him against certain political interests in the country. In between his ambition to turn around the fortunes of Benue State for the better, the 1982 economic crisis that hit Nigeria as a result of the oil glut at the international market slowed down his drive. The opposition from within and outside the state felt it was time to get him out. They cashed in on this and almost made political capital out of it. But he survived all until the military struck on December 31st, 1983. *Aper Aku: The Rise of Minority Politics in Nigeria* is an attempt by a journalist to narrate the inner thoughts and dreams of a true leader. Evidently, history has judged Aku as a great giant and not a pygmie as his bitter enemies wanted all to believe.

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